Fodder for Recruitment and Food for Thought: Results of the Nagoya University Program for Academic Exchange (NUPACE) Follow-up Survey on Exchange Student Alumni of April 2009~March 2014

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Abstract

To what extent do exchange programmes influence the future study/career paths and life choices of participants? In what ways do strengthened bonds to the host country and institution manifest themselves after exchange students complete their programmes? This report, attempting to answer these questions, presents the results of a survey carried out on exchange alumni of the Nagoya University Program for Academic Exchange (NUPACE), who were enrolled at this University between April 2009 and March 2014. Not only does the information garnered broaden the programme co-ordinators understanding of the significance of exchange programmes; numerical data on satisfaction levels with respect to academic and social life, as well as the living environment in Nagoya, can potentially be applied to more focused recruitment and promotion of the programme.

Keywords

Student exchange programmes in Japan; follow-up survey; exchange student alumni

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1. Background and Purpose of Survey

Japan's Student Exchange Support Program (Scholarship for Short-term Study in Japan) was launched in 1995, under the administrative umbrella of the Ministry of Education (MEXT) and management of the Japan Association for Student Services (JASSO).1 Following the lead of the JYA system employed in the United States, its overt purpose was to "encourage student exchange between universities in Japan and their overseas partner institutions, promote understanding and friendship between the countries participating, and strengthen the internationalisation and competitiveness of Japanese universities". In line with MEXT's cue, Japanese national universities scrambled to establish shortterm exchange programmes that would benefit from governmental financial assistance and faculty posts, and the Nagoya University Program for Academic Exchange

¹ Formerly, the Association of International Education, Japan (AIEJ).

(NUPACE), too, was created within one year, in February 1996.

In the nineteen years that have followed, 65% of the 1,407 exchange students who passed through the NU-PACE door have benefitted from JASSO financial assistance. Nevertheless, a large-scale follow up survey to determine continued links with Japan has hitherto never been carried out.

Accordingly, a survey was devised in January 2015 to elicit whether, and in what ways, the exchange experience at Nagoya University actually influenced the further studies, career paths, and life choices of NUPACE alumni who enrolled at this University between April 2009 and March 2014. A secondary objective was to produce numerical data on satisfaction levels with respect to the academics, social life and the general living environment in Nagoya, information that could potentially be applied to more focused recruitment and promotion of the programme. The results of the survey are presented below.

2. Methodology and Approach

The follow-up survey took the form of a questionnaire, encompassing twenty-three questions (some of which incorporate sub-questions), that invited respondents to answer both in a multiple-choice format and type answers to open-ended questions.² The questionnaire was devised on a excel worksheet, and sent to alumni via e-mail.³ Alumni were given between February 1 and 9, 2015 to respond, again by attaching their completed questionnaire to an e-mail address set up especially for the purpose of the survey. The questionnaire itself was devised in English; however, instructions were provided in both English and Japanese, and respondents were given the choice of answering open-ended questions in either of the languages.

The follow-up survey was addressed to all 520 students who participated as exchange students in NUPACE between April 2009 and March 2014. In addition to ascertaining the personal details of respondents for the purpose of categorisation (Section A), survey content focused on, 1) the effectiveness of NUPACE PR and publicity (Section B), 2) satisfaction with the academic programme/lifestyle at Nagoya University (Section C), 3) influence of NUPACE on the study/career path of participants (Section D) and, 4) continued social networking/relations with Japan (Section E).

3. Survey Results

For reasons of limitation of space, the author is unable to introduce all results of the survey, but hopes to convey the essence of data relevant to the objectives outlined above.

3.1 Composition of Respondents (Q1~10)

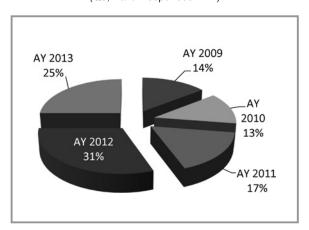
124 alumni (23.8% of the total NUPACE student body of 520 in the relevant period) responded to the questionnaire. Here, in addition to thirty-five cases of "sending errors", it can be presumed that a certain percentage of the alumni body has during these five years discontinued the use of e-mail addresses that NUPACE has registered in its database, and which are still operational. Furthermore, a number of alumni indicated that, due to software incompatibility problems, they could not view the contents of the questionnaire. Accordingly, while it is evident that NUPACE was unable to effectively reach out to all of the subjects of this survey, the fact that 124 alumni responded within stipulated ten-day period should be favourably evaluated. The composition of the respondents is depicted in *Pie-charts 1* to 4, and *Graph* 1 below.

As is visible in *Pie-chart 1*, 56% of respondents participated in NUPACE between AY 2012 and AY 2013. This high response rate for the latter two years of the

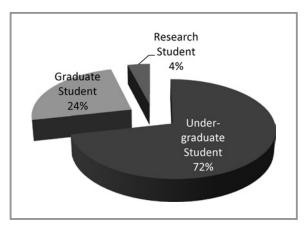
 $^{^{\}scriptscriptstyle 2}\,$ See appendix for the contents of the survey.

³ The authors deliberately avoided an online survey to circumvent problems with google access in the PRC.

Pie-chart 1. Respondents' Year of Enrolment (Q5, Valid Responses: 124)



Pie-chart 3. Respondents' NUPACE Student Status (Q3, Valid Responses: 123)

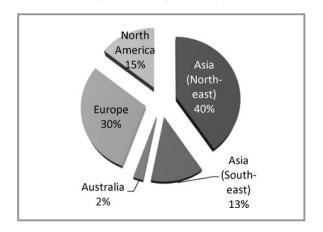


five-year period may be attributed to, 1) the proximity of the exchange student experience, 2) the larger number of students in these years, and 3) the higher probability of successful access via e-mail.

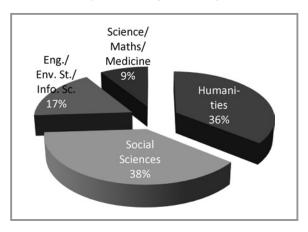
With regard to region of home institution (*Pie-chart 2*), student status (*Pie-chart 3*), and academic discipline (*Pie-chart 4*), the composition of respondents provides a sufficiently accurate cross-section of the entire NU-PACE alumni body. Although gender proved to have little bearing on the results of the survey, readers are asked to note that 50% of respondents were male, and 50% female (Q2 of survey).

The current status of respondents (Q10) is particularly noteworthy, as it provides a measure of the extent to which links to Japan are being maintained. As evident

Pie-chart 2. Respondents' Region of Home Institution (Q1, Valid Responses: 124)



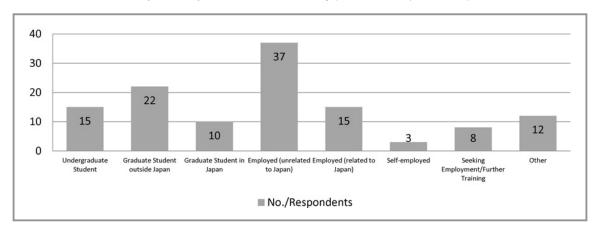
Pie-chart 4. Respondents' Academic Discipline (Q4, Valid Responses: 123)



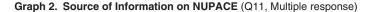
in *Graph 1*, as many as 20.5% of the NUPACE alumni of AY 2009-2014 continue to have an active association with Japan, taking the form of either graduate studies in this country (8.2%) or Japan-related employment (12.3%). As concerns respondents in Japan-related employment, the figures can be further broken down as, 1) employment by a foreign organisation having relations with Japan (five respondents), and 2) employment by a Japanese organisation, working either in Japan or abroad (ten respondents). With regard to further education, of the ten students currently pursuing higher degrees in Japan, five are enrolled at Nagoya University.

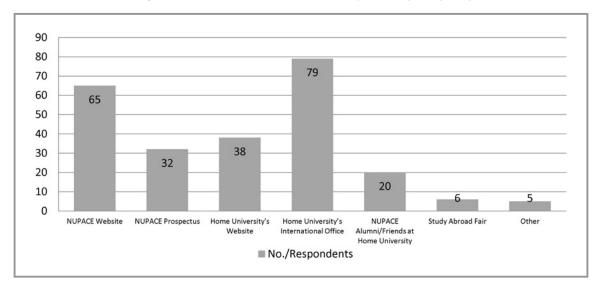
3.2 NUPACE PR and Publicity: Sources of Information prior to Arrival (Q11)

Public relations and a focused publicity strategy are of utmost importance in sustaining a successful exchange



Graph 1. Respondents' Current Activity (Q10, Valid Responses: 122)





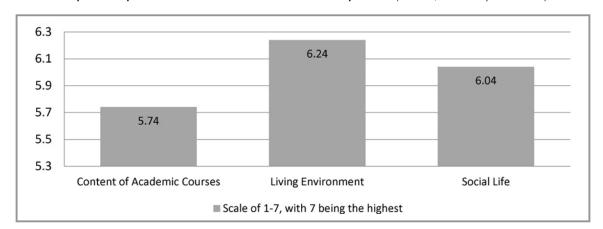
programme. In this section of the survey, the author's objective was to discern how NUPACE students actually learn about the programme, so that the most effective communication channels can be further reinforced.

Graph 2, as expected, shows that a large number of potential exchange students obtain information on programme from the NUPACE website, and it is imperative that the NUPACE Office both updates and improves the content of this medium of information dissemination. However, another even more significant channel of promotion appears to be the international office of the students' home universities. Here, more efforts must be

made to enhance communication avenues with Nagoya University's partner universities. Currently, e-mail correspondence is the primary tool of contact. However, the data in *Graph 2* would suggest that the co-ordinating of more frequent face-to-face meetings with counterparts, as is possible at, for example, international education conferences such as APAIE, EAIE, and NAFSA,⁴ may well comprise a complementary PR strategy.

Conversely, study abroad fairs do not prove a significant source of information for potential exchange students. And, it appears that the NUPACE prospectus, in its hard copy version, is viewed less than originally thought.

⁴ Asia Pacific Association for International Education, European Association for International Education, National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, respectively.



Graph 3. Respondents' Satisfaction with the NUPACE Experience (Q12-14, Valid Responses: 123)

Ideas from respondents as to how publicity could be improved (Q11-a) focused on, 1) more direct, Internet-based communication strategies between NUPACE and prospective exchange students, including the use of SNS such as Facebook and Twitter and the holding of teleconferences with prospective students at their home institutions, and, 2) the systematic use of peers for PR purposes, for example through the appointment of student ambassadors, networking using NUPACE alumni, and encouragement of NUPACE student blogs. Some respondents felt that information sent to partner universities was not disseminated in an efficient or timely manner, and that a PR method that more radically and directly reaches out to students would prove more effective.

Such ideas certainly merit thought; the question for NUPACE being how to balance "direct communication" with prospective students with the traditional constraints of exchange student partnerships, including incoming student quotas, and the jurisdiction of the international office at the home institution in selecting candidates for exchange.

3.3 Satisfaction with Academic Programme/Lifestyle at Nagoya University (Q12~16)

This part of the questionnaire, gauging student satisfaction levels, was not primarily designed to detect specific problem areas in the academic programme and devise methods for tackling them. (NUPACE carries out a general programme survey at the end of each semester for exactly this purpose.) Instead, it aimed to elicit simple statistics that focused on the extent of contentment, not only vis-a-vis the programme, but also living environment and social life at Nagoya University, in order to provide authoritative data for NUPACE publicity. Nevertheless, the results were illuminating for a number of reasons (*Graph 3*).

Here, although satisfaction levels with all aspects of the NUPACE experience were considerable, it was Nagoya University's living environment that boasted the top score. The content of the academic programme, by contrast, lagged behind infrastructural and social factors, somewhat surprisingly, considering the launch of the Global 30 International Programs in 2011. Interestingly, although English-taught courses numbering in the hundreds and spanning all academic disciplines, have become available to NUPACE students from this time, satisfaction levels have not unequivocally risen in tandem (*Graph 4*).

One factor assumed to adversely impact levels of satisfaction with academic life comprises the difficulty of transferring credits from Nagoya University to exchange students' home institutions; however, data made available by respondents prove that this is not necessarily the case (*Table 1*).

Although credit transfer remains a serious issue, only 6% of respondents admitted that the lack of such recognition caused problems for them. Accordingly, one may

6.2 6 6.03 5.8 5.6 5.61 5.55 5.4 5.51 5.2 AY 2010 AY 2009 AY 2011 AY 2012 AY 2013 ■ Scale of 1-7, with 7 being the highest

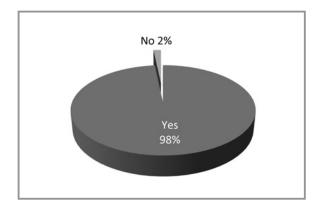
Graph 4. Respondents' Satisfaction with the Content of Academic Courses according to Year of Enrolment (Q12, Valid Responses: 123)

Table 1. Was the Academic Work you conducted at NUPACE Recognised by your Home Institution?

(Q16, Valid Responses: 122)

	No./Respondents	Percentage
1. Yes, all work conducted was recognised	42	35%
2. Yes, all work related to my "major" was recognised	21	17%
3. Yes, work related to my "major" was partially recognised	17	14%
4. Yes, but insufficiently, and this caused me problems	7	6%
5. No, but I was aware of this before participating in the exchange/it does not concern me	32	26%
6. No, I was unable to transfer any academic work, and this caused me problems	0	0%
7. Other	5	2%

Pie-chart 5. Would you Recommend an Exchange at NU to your Friends? (Q15, Valid Responses: 123)



surmise that slightly less than stellar satisfaction levels with the academic facet of the programme may, in reality, be attributable to actual course content, rather than credit mobility.

One a more general note, one extremely positive outcome of the follow-up survey may be elicited from *Piechart 5*. An overwhelming percentage of respondents

indicated that they would recommend NUPACE to their friends, thereby providing excellent fodder for propaganda.

Indeed, 116 respondents provided reasons for endorsing NUPACE. These principally, but not exclusively, revolved around, 1) the multicultural study and living environment that exists at Nagoya University, 2) exchange programme organisation and pastoral care of students, 3) friendliness and professionalism of professors and administrative staff, and 4) opportunities for social interaction. Some representative comments on why an exchange at Nagoya University is to be recommended are listed below:

- "Nagoya actively supports exchange students well and provides lots of opportunities to make Japanese friends. At other universities I have heard of less-support or even active separation of exchange and local students, so I appreciated the Nagoya experience a lot!" (Australia)

- "The whole package university + social life + city". (Sweden)
- "I think NUPACE is a well-developed program and in many ways NUPACE takes good care of students and is thoughtful. I think this is very important to students, especially for undergraduate students who haven't had many ideas about life". (P.R. China)
- "Its detailed instruction manuals and educatory sessions on official procedures required for life in Japan". (R.O. Korea)
- 「割に自由な雰囲気の中でやりたいことや学びたいことが 勉強できるし、学生生活の側面からも、人と仲良くなれる機 会が多いということがいいと思います。留学生活を通して得 られることは、勉強だけではないということが分かります」. (R.O. Korea)
- "For the degree: The opportunity to see world economics and politics as well as social problems faced all over the world from a Japanese and Asian perspective is great. For personal matters: It is just overwhelming to get to know so many nice and diverse people, it's been one the best decisions I've ever made". (Germany)

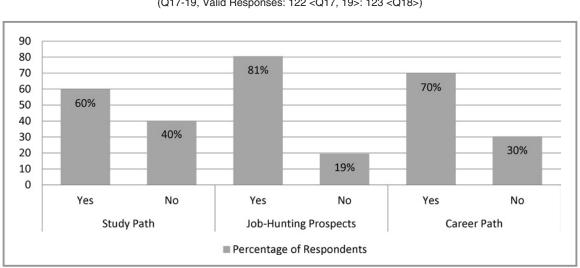
Conversely, three of the 123 respondents posted reasons for not being able to endorse NUPACE, all of which centred upon the academic programme: "[I would recommend NUPACE] only if they want to spend time

in Japan and improve their Japanese. Not if quality/ selection of classes and pursuit of their major is important to them". (USA)

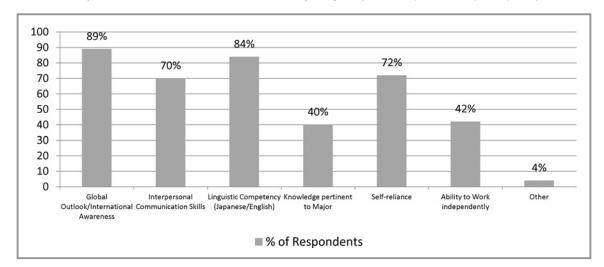
3.4 Influence of NUPACE on Study/Career Path and Personal Development (Q17~20)

This section of the survey aimed to elicit whether the exchange experience at Nagoya University has had ramifications on the life choices and career prospects of NUPACE alumni, and whether participants felt that the programme exerted an impact on their personal development. The author was interested in learning what gains, tangible and intangible, respondents felt that they had accrued through NUPACE, again, with potential ramifications for NUPACE publicity.

As demonstrated by *Graph 5*, the majority of respondents felt that their exchange at NUPACE impacted their study and career paths, and observed this experience to be particularly beneficial as far as their job-hunting prospects are/were concerned. As one respondent succinctly noted, "Many companies are interested in my exchange experience in Japan because they think it demonstrates my international vision and strong adaptability in a non-English speaking country. I have also become interested in job-hunting at multinational companies after returning to my home country" (P.R. China). With regard to study paths,



Graph 5. Influence of NUPACE on Study/Career Path of Respondents (Q17-19, Valid Responses: 122 <Q17, 19>: 123 <Q18>)



Graph 6. Breakdown of Personal Skills Developed by Respondents (Q20-a, Multiple-response)

respondents commented that NUPACE had heightened their interest in Japan, as well as influencing the direction of their higher degrees and choice of graduate schools, with a number of respondents applying to study in Japan. The data also reveals, somewhat inevitably, that the study paths of alumni majoring in the humanities and social sciences were more heavily influenced by NUPACE than those of students majoring in engineering and the sciences, and that alumni possessing level N1 of the JLPT⁵ perceived their job-hunting prospects and career paths to have been boosted most radically. Indeed, of the fifteen respondents currently engaged in Japan-related employment (cf. *Graph 1* above), nine possess JLPT N1.

In addition to concrete indicators such as enhanced study/career path options, 100% of respondents (Q20, valid responses: 123) indicated that their personal skills, a somewhat less tangible commodity, had developed as a result of participating in NUPACE. "I believe that my time in Nagoya greatly influenced my career path because, not only did I learn what path I wanted to take, but I also grew immensely as a person while living there on my own. It was a very difficult experience, but I value it over anything else I experienced in my undergraduate career" (USA). The breakdown

can be seen in Graph 6.

As is evident, the nurturing of a global outlook and improved linguistic skills scored top, followed by an enhanced sense of self-reliance and interpersonal communication skills. The knowledge front, by contrast, fared comparatively badly; with only 40% of respondents believing that they increased their understanding in their major field of study. This data again, indicates that NUPACE, as a package has much to offer, albeit Nagoya University's academic curriculum is not sufficiently challenging for some students.

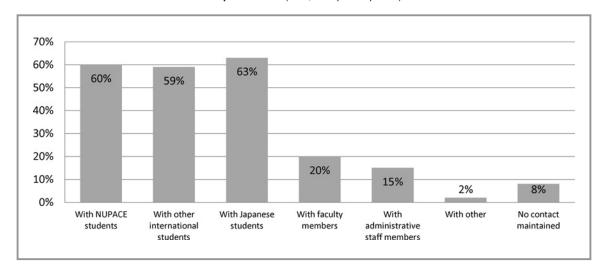
3.5 Social Networking/Continued Relations with Japan (Q21~22)

The final section of the questionnaire aimed to elicit, 1) the strength of social networks that had been formed in Japan via the NUPACE hub and, 2) respondents' continued affinity to this country, as determined by return visits for a miscellary of purposes.

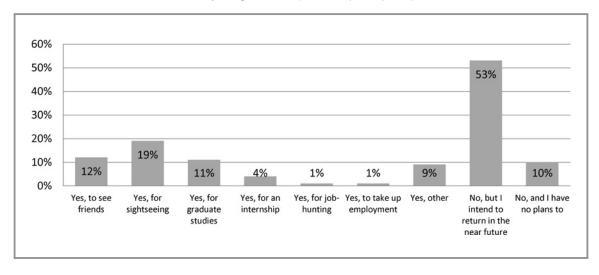
Graph 7 shows that 92% of the NUPACE alumni of AY 2009 to AY 2013 continue to maintain contact with acquaintances made at Nagoya University, thus demonstrating that friendships made during an exchange are not fleeting in nature. Moreover, contrary to expecta-

⁵ Japanese Language Proficiency Test, as administered by the Japan Foundation and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services (JEES).

Graph 7. Percentage of Respondents Maintaining Contact with Nagoya University
Acquaintances (Q21, Multiple-response)



Graph 8. Percentage of Respondents Who have Returned to Japan after Completing NUPACE (Q22, Multiple-response)



tions, the data reveals that the largest percentage of respondents stays in touch with Japanese students, and not NUPACE peers. This development is perfectly attuned to JASSO's objective of "promoting understanding and friendship between the countries participating", and should be highly-appraised.

The extent to which bonds with Japan have been solidified is further demonstrated by *Graph 8*, which provides data on the number of alumni who have returned to Japan since completing their exchange. More than one-third of the respondents (37%) have made at least one return journey to Japan. Moreover, of the 63% of respondents who indicated that they have not returned,

only 10% unequivocally state that they have no intention of doing so. The remainder appear to maintain (nostalgic) ties to the country, wishing to re-visit in the near future. Revealingly, returning to Japan for employment purposes does not loom as a dominant objective, or possibly, attractive option; instead, it is sightseeing and friends that lure alumni back, although the percentage of alumni returning for graduate studies is also noteworthy.

4. Concluding Comments

This follow-up survey was not bereft of defects and limitations. Not enough consideration was given to technical

issues, in particular software compatibility, when devising a platform for the questionnaire. Moreover, in retrospect, the author omitted to ask some very pertinent questions, including why the alumni had chosen Nagoya University has an exchange destination in the first place (indeed, to what extent were they given a choice?), and what their prime purpose for coming here was.

Nevertheless, as a first attempt to measure the impact of NUPACE on exchange students, this survey delivered a treasure trove of data that squarely affirms the role and significance of the programme. One in five of the alumni respondents of AY 2009~AY 2013 are currently studying in Japan, or engaged in employment related to Japan; over 70% of concur that participation in NU-PACE has positively impacted their job-hunting and career prospects; more than one in three have returned to Japan after completion of the programme; 92% have maintained contact with acquaintances made during their exchange, including most dominantly Japanese students (respondents: 63%); 100% felt that they honed personal skills and developed as human beings; and 98% declared that they would recommend NUPACE to their friends.

Undeniably, issues revolving around academic course content exist. Moreover, less anachronistic methods of information dissemination, PR and publicity need to be re-examined and developed. However, as, 1) an endeav-

our in international human resource development, 2) a tool for cultivating closer ties between the Japan and all regions of the globe, and by extension, 3) as far as the Government is concerned, a successful soft power strategy, NUPACE and probably all student exchange programmes in Japan should be deemed as valued-added undertakings.

- "I am still very grateful to the administrative staff and the professors who did a great job in making this one year exchange the most enjoyable and enriching experience of my life. I met so many people and changed so much in a positive way thanks to all of that. I think most of the former NUPACE students feel the same: an irreplaceable experience in Japan and so many great memories. It is almost sad to think that that experience was unique and will never occur again" (France).

Special Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution to this project made by Mr. Shuhei Sugimori (M2, Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University) and Mr. Shohei Sato (M1, Graduate School of Economics, Nagoya University). It is no exaggeration to state that their gleaning and analysis of data enabled this manuscript to be penned on time. Needless to say, responsibility for any errors in the presentation of the information rests solely with the author.⁶

⁶ Feedback to this article should be addressed to Claudia Ishikawa at k46189a@cc.nagoya-u.ac.jp.

Appendix

[5] Month/year of admission to NUPACE

Nagoya University Program for Academic Exchange Follow-up Survey: NUPACE Alumni of 2009-2014

	September 20	[6] Period of exchange	□Full-year □One semester	[7] Financial status during exchange.	JASSO scholarship Other scholarship from Japan (Name: Scholarship/grant/Joan from central/local Government in home country Scholarship/grant/Joan from home institution Private scholarship/grant/Joan from home country	Privately-financed/financial assistance from family	[8] Japanese language ability upon completion of your exchange.	□Elementary □Intermediate	Nadvanced [8.1] Phase rick if von have nassed II.PM Level 1.M1	[9] English language ability.	☐Elementary ☐Intermediate ☐Advanced	□Native	[9-1] Please tick, if applicable	TYOFIL (Score:	The state of the s	[10] Current status.	Undergraduate student Graduate student (excluding in Japan) Graduate student (excluding in Japan)	Unautane suuren moapan (eachtumik ragbya omversiiv)
Follow-up Survey: NUPACE Alumni of 2009-2014	A. Personal Information	[1] Which region do you come from?	□Africa □America (North)	America (Central & South)	│ Asia (North-East) │ Asia (South—East) │ Australia │ Europe	[1-a] Name of country in which home university is located.		[2] Sex	□Mate □Female	[3] Student status whilst at NUPACE	□Undergraduate □Graduate □Research	[4] School of affiliation whilst at NUPACE	☐ Agricultural Sciences	□ECIS (IEEC) □Economics	Education Engineering Frankommental Struktes (Gred)	☐ Informatics & Sciences/Information Science ☐ International Development (Grad.)	□Languages & Cultures (Grad.) □Law □Letters	□Mathematics (Grad.) □Medicine □Science

☐Graduate student at Nagoya University ☐Employed (employment unrelated to Japan) ☐Employed by a foreign organisation having relations with Japan (working abroad)	[15] Would you recommend an exchange at Nagoya University to your friends? _Yes
Employed in Japan by a foreign organisation Removed by a Japannese organisation working either in Japan or abroad	
Self-employed Seeking employment/further training	[15-a] If "Yes", what aspect would you recommend the most?
B. NUPACE PR and Publicity [11] How did you obtain information on NUPACE prior to your arrival? (Multiple-response possible) □NUPACE website □NUPACE prospectus	[15-b] If "No", please specify why.
□My home university website □My home university's international office □NUPACE alumui/friends at my home university □Study abroad fair	D. Influence of NUPACE on Study/Career Path [16] Was the academic work you conducted at NUPACE recognised by your home institution?
[11-a] Specify what, if any, improvements can be made to the publicity of the programme.	□Yes, all work conducted was recognised by my home university □Yes, all work related to my "major" was recognised by my home university □Yes, work related to my "major" was partially recognised by my home university □Yes, but insufficiently, and this caused me problems □No, but I was aware of this prior to participating in the exchange/it does not concern me □No, I was unable to transfer any academic work, and this caused me problems □Other (
	[17] Did participation in NUPACE influence your study path?
C. Satisfaction with Academic Programme/Lifestyle at Nagoya University [12] On the whole, were you satisfied by the content of the academic courses offered at Nagoya University?	□Yes □No [17-a] If "Yes", please specify.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very dissatisfied very satisfied	
[13] On the whole, were you satisfied with the living environment at Nagoya University?	
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very dissatisfied	[18] Do you consider that participation in NUPAUE influenced (will influence) your job-hunting prospects?
[14] On the whole, were you satisfied with your social life in Nagoya?	□Yes □No
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 very dissatisfied very satisfied	If "Yes", do you consider this influence to be positive or negati
	negative positive
ಣ	4

[18-b] If you have any comments with regard to the above, please specify.	[22] Have you returned to Japan since completing the NUPACE programme? (Multiple-response possible)
[19] Do you consider that participation in NUPACE influenced (will influence) your career path? \[\Backslant \text{Yes} \] \[\Backslant \text{No} \] [19-a] If "Yes", please specify.	□Yes, for meet up with friends □Yes, for sightseeing □Yes, for graduate studies □Yes, for graduate studies □Yes, for job-hunting □Yes, for job-hunting □Yes, to take up employment □Nes, other (□No, but I intend to return in the near future (□No, I have not returned to Japan since completing NUPACE, and have no plans to
	F. Further Comments [23] If you have any further comments or observations, please specify.
[20] Do you consider that participation in NUPACE helped you to develop any personal skills? $$\square \rm Yes$	
□No [20-a] If "Yes", what skills did you develop?	
☐Global outlook/intercultural awareness ☐Interpersonal communication skills ☐Iniguistic competency (Japanese/English) ☐Knowledge pertinent to your major ☐Self-reliance ☐ Ability to wood independently.	We may wish to contact you to confirm/follow up on the information provided in this questionnaire. If you have no objection to being contacted, please fill in the details below:
☐ Abulty to work independently ☐ Other: E. Social Networking/Continued Relations with Japan	Your e-mail address:
[21] Do you maintain contact with fellow students, professors and/or administrative staff from your time as a NUPACE exchange student? (Multiple-response possible) Yes, with NUPACE students Yes, with other international students Yes, with Japanese students Yes, with Japanese students Yes, with administrative staff members Yes, with administrative staff members Yes, other (Yes	アンケートへのご協力ありがとうございました! Thank you very much for your co-operation!

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