

## Survey Reform

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On October 27, 1998 *The Japan Times* reported that there is a call for educational reform in all Japanese universities. This nationwide call for reform is another attempt by educational authorities in Japan to correct problems at higher levels of Japanese education. According to this news article advisors to the Ministry of Education recommend that "Management of universities should become more flexible, responsible and international. They further advise and encourage universities to implement changes such as carry out fall admissions and stricter grading".

In Japan over the years there have been many attempts at reform. One month after *The Japan Times* article I was the guest lecturer at Beppu University. I lectured on "Reform Leadership and Vision in Japanese Education" for the English Language and Literature Department's yearly gathering. I am convinced that some of the students and professors in the audience did not want to hear what I had to say. I do not think that they wanted to hear it because I told the truth about reform, vision and leadership in Japanese Education. I spoke the truth as I understood it to be because it is the logic of my nature and the logic of my experience. I know that sometimes the truth hurts so I hoped that they did not cringe at hearing the truth. In fact I had hoped that they would rejoice in what I had to say. I told them the truth as I believed it to be because I have faith in the truth as a purifying experience.

Shortly thereafter, I designed and then administered a quick survey on university reform in Japan to students in my sophomore and junior classes at Beppu University. Since this information is about Japanese students and the future of Japanese education, I was interested in what Japanese students had to say and what they thought about the advancing reform

movement.

The survey instrument consist of 26 closed ended questions. Eighty-two students completed the survey. Seventy-five at Beppu and seven from Gakushuin University. My objective is not to subject the results to rigorous statistical analysis, but to get a quick, basic sense of their feelings about reform. So I report questions, with the actual response to each question. For the sake of clarification and to resolve my own interest I have selected what I feel are the most interesting responses to the survey. The raw data for all the responses are included in the appendices. (SEE APPENDIX A, B, C, D, FOR RAW DATA)

In this report I present the questions and responses from the Beppu University students. I also feel fortunate to have been able to procure a sample of responses to this survey from students attending Gakushuin University in Tokyo. I would like to thank Professor Ueda and the administrators at Beppu University for their support, and for allowing me to conduct this survey. I would also like to thank the students at Gakushuin University for their support, interest, and cooperation in their response to this survey.

I believe that the combination of responses from sophmores and junior students attending Beppu University and my sample responses from Gakushuin University students may be very interesting to students and scholars across Japan.

### **Commentary**

In this section I have offset individual questions with subsequent discussion of the contents and the relevant student response. I did this to make it easier for the reader to survey and perceive my interest in certain questions and for them to comprehend the corresponding data.

2. Did you think there is a need to reform Japanese Universities?

yes [73] no [9]

3. Did you think Japanese Universities can reform quickly?

yes [18] no [64]

4. Did you think Japanese Universities students can reform quickly?

yes [18] no [64]

Questions two three, and four, are general questions about reform in the Japanese university system. In response to question two 73 of the students said yes and 9 said no. These numbers indicate that overwhelming thinking by students that there is a need for reform or change in the Japanese university system. Questions three and four deal with how quickly universities and students could handle reform measures. A large number of respondents feel neither universities nor students can reform quickly. However, 18 students did feel that both the universities and students can reform quickly.

5. Did you think Japanese Universities students are lazy?

yes [63] no [19]

6. Did you think Japanese Universities students study hard?

yes [21] no [60] no ans. [1]

Questions numbered five and six are about the students themselves. A strong 63 of the respondents feel that university students are lazy. 19 respondents believe that they are not lazy. 60 respondents think that they do not study hard. 21 students think they do study hard.

7. Do you feel there a sense of crisis in the universities in Japan?

yes [49] no [32] no ans. [2]

Only 49 students feel that there is a sense of crisis in the university system. 32 respondents do not think there is a crisis in the university.



perception of the university system. This is a bad judgment by students both for the future of reform at the university level and for present university professors.

12. Do you believe that skipping classes is no problem?

yes [28] no [53] no ans. [1]

Despite the fact that 53 respondents do not believe that skipping classes is not a problem, 28 respondents think that it is acceptable to skip or not attend class regularly. This is an alarming number of students who think they do not have to go to class.

19. Did you actually expect to pass the class with out actually attending the class?

yes [34] no [47] no ans. [1]

There is a close relationship between questions twelve and nineteen. A larger number 34 respondents expected to pass class with out actually attending the class. On the other hand only 47 respondents know or think that they would not pass if they did not attend class.

14. Are today's students less able to think and judge for themselves?

yes [42] no [40]

17. Are today's students less innovative, less creative, have less thirst for knowledge?

yes [57] no [22] no ans. [3]

20. Do Japanese students intellectually support and lead Japanese society?

yes [39] no [41] no ans. [2]

Questions numbers fourteen, seventeen, and twenty are related to how the students think about themselves. These questions asks them about their perception of their own individuality and ask for a self-analysis. It involves them as individuals and their potential as their future leaders. Yet again the respondents are split on this question 42 say yes they are less able to

think and judge for themselves, and 40 respondents saying they are able to think and judge for themselves.

Question seventeen is more telling about students in terms of a truly significant variable. 57 respondents feel that they are less innovative, less creative, and have less thirst for knowledge. Only 22 respondents do not think they are less innovative, less creative, and have a less thirst for knowledge. I would think that question twenty is of more concern to the Japanese government, because it is more of a futures question in that it concerns future leadership ability. The students are almost evenly split on this question 39 say yes and 41 say no.

16. Should Universities make grading systems clearer and stricter?

yes [60] no [21] no ans. [1]

I am a little confused by the answers to question number sixteen. Are the respondents clear in their thinking about the current grading system? Do they then think that the current grading system is not clear and not strict? 60 respondents say yes that universities should make grading systems clearer and stricter. 21 students just don't agree.

18. Should educational reforms emphasize creativity and respect for the individual?

yes [66] no [10] no a [6]

Question number eighteen is interesting because of the large number of respondents that did not answer the question. Many of the students answered yes, a smaller number answered no. But, 6 students did not answer this question. I had to think if this question was a valid question and if it was did the 6 respondents understand the relevance to them of creativity and respect for the individual. Or it was not a valid question and they were really confused. I do not know.

23. Are Japan's young people are Japan's most precious natural resource?

yes [56] no [23] no ans. [3]

24. Japan's young people the most effective in making long term change in Japan's society?

yes [59] no [21] no ans. [2]

Fifty-six students said yes, they think Japan's young people are Japan's most precious natural resource 23 said no. I am surprised that 23 students did not think that Japanese youth are Japan's most precious resource. Their responses match or are almost the same for question number twenty-four. 59 said yes Japanese young people are the most effective in making long term change in Japan's society 21 said no.

25. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university students?

good [3] so so [49] bad [30]

26. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university ?

good [6] so so [56] bad [19] no ans. [1]

Questions twenty-five and question twenty-six deal with the quality of today's students and the quality of today's university. 3 respondents said the quality of today's universities students were good. 49 said that the quality was so so and 30 said they were bad. 6 respondents said the quality of today's universities students were good. 56 said that the quality was so so and 19 said they were bad. It seems that a large number of respondents are not so thrilled about the present quality of the students or the quality of the university, nor does it seem like they really care.

### **Student Commentary**

In addition to this survey, I asked my sophomore and junior students to make additional comments about the new reform movement or general comments about their view of the Japanese educational system. I found these comments to be informative as well as instructional. I made some

small grammatical changes to some of the students' text but I did not change the substance of their comments. As I did with the survey I am reporting the responses that were the most noteworthy to me. Prior to writing these comments, I instructed my students that this was entirely voluntary. It should also be noted that not all of the students responded to the comments section.

(1) "I want to study hard every day. Recently, I often went to the public library. I read three books. The books affected me. I want to change myself. I want to be smart. I don't have to waste my precious time. I realized many things. Japanese university needs to reform, but Japanese university students more need to reform themselves."

(2) "I think all university students are not "bad students". Entering university is very hard. Do you know "center examination"? It is very difficult. Students who want to enter university for example, Oita University, Tokyo University, Kyushu University and so on, must pass this test. The test has five subjects, Japanese, math, science, English and history. We had studied for sixteen years to eighteen years during our high school days. If we failed one subject, we have no hope to enter the university, the system is strange. So once the students enter the university, they don't study as hard as they did in high school. I took the "center test" examination, but I failed math. Not only me but my school friends failed too. My friends had to study for another year. So, now my friends are in their second year, but they can enter the university that they want."

(3) "Why do university teachers want to have a revolution? I think that university students should change for them selves. But, maybe they need the help from the teachers, I think."

(4) "What do you think about this question? Is it important to graduate from the university, or more important to study about myself?"



(5) "You tend to think that all Japanese education and students qualities are bad. But I am satisfied with some classes. Our university gave me some good chances. So some of universities are good I think. But I like English conversation and French conversation. I entered this university to learn these subjects. I want to take these classes. I don't want to take law and some other subjects. I wish that my university would change, because it is important we should change our education. But now we can't even succeed with the present system. So the first thing that we have to do is succeed with the present system. When we do that then we can change the system."

(6) "At the high level of university students study hard, and spend a long time. But, at a low level university it is a play land, a leisure land. Some people study, others don't study, so case by case."

(7) "I think that Japanese university makes a mistake. Because, if we are absent from school on purpose, maybe most of the students will get credit anyway. I think that it isn't good for students. I think that it is important to attend class. Now Japanese university is like a leisure land because many students don't study hard."

(8) "I think all students are not lazy. But, most students are lazy. If students don't study, they can graduate easily. So some students that study hard think that this isn't fair."

(9) "Today's Japanese student are lazy, I think. Because, I saw students that did not attend this college classes. Lazy students get credit. I think that it is stupid. So, I think that reform needs to come quickly."

(10) "Japanese universities problems are difficult. I think that university students are lazy. But, there are university students that study hard, for example, Tokyo University students. It's case by case, I imagine. When I entered the university, I want to study hard. At first I studied English very

hard. But, recently I am lazy. This summer I went to Hawaii. I was shocked by Hawaiian students. They studied very hard, so they have a dream. I think that a lot of Japanese university students don't have dreams, and they are lazy. I want to study hard again."

(11) "I think Japanese students are lazy. They break their promises and they can't study hard. Japanese students hate to study. Japanese students think that university is a leisure land, university is a study place."

(12) "We always think that students must change, but we are students of university, and we become lazy. So, though we have to change, it is difficult to change, so we become lazy. But, when I went to Hawaii, I could change a little. So, our students in Japan need the chance to change. So, I think that both teachers and students need to change."

(13) "I think that today's universities make a mistake. At first entering Japanese universities is difficult, and only some people can enter. The best way is making entering easy and making graduating difficult."

(14) "I think that Japan should reform not only the university but also high school and junior high school. Because, today's situation in the university is based on the elementary education which force the students to study."

(15) "Nowadays Japanese students don't know what they want to do, neither do I. Maybe Japanese society has made us like that? Of course this is not the only reason, but it does influence our thoughts. The more Japan has power economically the more the students become lazy. I think it is so because we tend to depend on our society."

(16) "I think that the most important matter is to establish Japanese vision. And then, we can better observe the choice that best fits the

university direction by ourselves. We need to be doing life long learning. The Japanese government has to make the environment so that all of the people of Japan can study when they want."

(17) "I think that we have to reform thinking. Now, Japanese students haven't their own thinking, so Japanese students don't go to school. Japanese education has to teach not only how to "study", but the way to live in today's society. If the students have any thinking it is only dark thinking."

(18) "I think that the university quality is bad. The cost is high and the teachers are lazy. So Japanese university students are lazy. Japanese university students should have a part time job. I think that the university cost is the most important thing. I also think that the Japanese professors are bad. They are lazy. They don't have their own opinion. I think that they are like a robot machine. They teach us for money. The issue is the professors."

(19) "There are two types in college style. The first type to enter is difficult and graduation is easy. The second type to enter is easy and graduation is difficult. The first type is Japanese college style, the second type is American college style. If Japanese college change to American style, I don't think it will be successful. Because I don't think the Japanese can understand American styles good point."

(20) "When I checked these questions, I'm very interested in this problem. It is impossible for a easy way to solve this problem. This is a very difficult problem. I suppose that this problem relates to "society, education, politics, and family life in Japan", and many other things. The point in my opinion is that every thing should change including the system. I know and hear from many famous people for example politicians and teachers, but they still can't resolve this problem. We should go out and have a drink and talk about this

some day."

(21) "I think that the university can not reform quickly but can only reform slowly. The government is trying to reform the education system, but surely the junior high school and high school is changing."

(22) "Today's university students do not study hard, I think. Some students attend the lecture every day, but they are sleeping at this lecture. I think that they should not attend. They are not studying only coming. Also the teacher does not look at them, the teacher should look."

(23) "I think that we should change. Today's students are lazy. Some students don't go to college. It is not allowed. It is important for us to study hard."

(24) "Japanese students are very lazy. I think that universities must change the system and students too."

(25) "I think Japanese students are lazy. I think that Japanese examination is the problem. I studied very hard in high school."

(26) "I think Japanese students studied hard before they entered university, but they don't study hard after."

(27) "Japanese education continued study only junior high school and high school. These people who study hard in junior high school and high school, they think they will play more. Then these people play when they entered university, I think so."

(28) "Japanese students are lazy. When Japanese students are in junior high they study very hard. As soon as they become university students they begin to be lazy, when we go to university this is a problem for ourselves."

(29) "In universities we learn a lot of things. University also teach us American Literature in detail. But we don't need and use American Literature in ordinary life. I think we must learn more conversation."

(30) "In Japanese education students continue to study hard in junior high school and high school. These people who study hard in junior high school and high school, they think they will play more in the future. Then these people play when they enter university, I think so."

(31) "I don't agree that the American students study harder than the Japanese students. I think the reason why most people think it is so is that it just looks like such a thing."

(32) "I don't think that American students study harder than Japanese students."

### **Summary**

The main themes for all of these students comments revolves around their perceptions of themselves and observations of their classmates. Are Japanese university students lazy? Well, they seem to think so. Maybe it is because in comparison to how they used to study they are indeed lazy. Do they study as hard as they did in high school? Again, this seems to be a definite no. Needless to say the present students are not all that they were in high school and I have the definite feeling they do not want to be the same in university. Consequently there is the need of reform in the university system. I think there is the need for reform in educators, and the need to address this current inadequate situation both for the students and for ourselves.



14. Are today's students less able to think and judge for themselves?  
yes [42] no [40]
15. Do students come to school to learn? [54] or simply to waste time?  
[16] no ans. [12]
16. Should Universities make grading systems clearer and stricter?  
yes [60] no [21] no ans. [1]
17. Are today's students less innovative, less creative, have less thirst for  
knowledge? yes [57] no [22] no ans. [3]
18. Should educational reforms emphasize creativity and respect for the  
individual? yes [66] no [10] no ans. [6]
19. Did you actually expect to pass the class with out actually attending the  
class? yes [34] no [47] no ans. [1]
20. Do Japanese students intellectually support and lead Japanese society?  
yes [39] no [41] no ans. [2]
21. Knowledge that comes from experience more valuable than knowledge  
that doesn't? yes [64] no [15] no ans. [3]
22. The ultimate goal of test preparation to get into college will have to  
change? yes [58] no [20] no ans. [4]
23. Are Japan's young people are Japan's most precious natural resource?  
yes [56] no [23] no ans. [3]
24. Japan's young people the most effective in making long term change in  
Japan's society? yes [59] no [21] no ans. [2]
25. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university students?  
good [3] so so [49] bad [30]
26. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university ?  
good [6] so so [56] bad [19] no ans. [1]

APPENDIX B  
SOPHMORE CLASS BEPPU UNIVERSITY

1. Did you read the articles on the need to reform Japanese Universities?  
yes [41] no [ 7 ] no ans. [1]
2. Did you think there is a need to reform Japanese Universities?  
yes [45] no [ 4 ]
3. Did you think Japanese Universities can reform quickly?  
yes [ 9 ] no [40]
4. Did you think Japanese Universities students can reform quickly?  
yes [11] no [38]
5. Did you think Japanese Universities students are lazy?  
yes [35] no [14]
6. Did you think Japanese Universities students study hard?  
yes [12] no [36]
7. Do you feel there a sense of crisis in the universities in Japan  
yes [31] no [16] no ans. [1]
8. Will you enter graduate school?  
yes [24] no [24]
9. Are you involved in club activities?  
yes [19] no [28]
10. Should Japanese universities make entering easy and graduating  
difficult?  
yes [24] no [21] no ans. [1]
11. College is not the place to learn but collage is a place to play a leisure  
land?  
yes [8] no [40] no ans. [1]
12. Do you believe that skipping classes is no problem?  
yes [20] no [29]
13. Should the professor give credits to students who merely pass paper  
exams?  
yes [11] no [34] no ans. [4]
14. Are today's students less able to think and judge for themselves?  
yes [25] no [24]



15. Do students come to school to learn? [30] or simply to waste time?[8] no ans. [11]
16. Should Universities make grading systems clearer and stricter?  
yes [37] no [11] no ans. [1]
17. Are today's students less innovative, less creative, have less thirst for knowledge?  
yes [32] no [14] no a [3]
18. Should educational reforms emphasize creativity and respect for the individual?  
yes [36] no [7] no a [6]
19. Did you actually expect to pass the class with out actually attending the class?  
yes [18] no [30] no a [1]
20. Do Japanese students intellectually support and lead Japanese society?  
yes [29] no [19] no a [1]
21. Knowledge that comes from experience more valuable than knowledge that doesn't?  
yes [36] no [10] no a [3]
22. The ultimate goal of test preparation to get into college will have to change?  
yes [32] no [13 ] no a [1]
23. Are Japan's young people are Japan's most precious natural resource?  
yes [33] no [13] no a [3]
24. Japan's young people the most effective in making long term change in Japan's society?  
yes [37] no [10] no a [2]
25. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university students?  
good [3] so so [26] bad [20]
26. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university ?  
good [4] so so [33] bad [12]

APPENDIX C  
JUNIOR CLASS BEPPU UNIVERSITY

1. Did you read the articles on the need to reform Japanese Universities?  
yes [11] no [ 15]
2. Did you think there is a need to reform Japanese Universities?  
yes [22] no [ 4 ]
3. Did you think Japanese Universities can reform quickly?  
yes [6] no [20]
4. Did you think Japanese Universities students can reform quickly?  
yes [7] no [19]
5. Did you think Japanese Universities students are lazy?  
yes [21] no [5]
6. Did you think Japanese Universities students study hard?  
yes [7] no [19]
7. Do you feel there a sense of crisis in the universities in Japan?  
yes [13] no [14]
8. Will you enter graduate school? yes [11] no [13] no ans. [1]
9. Are you involved in club activities? yes [11] no [14]
10. Should Japanese universities make entering easy and graduating difficult?  
yes [10] no [16]
11. College is not the place to learn but collage is a place to play a leisure land?  
yes [5] no [21]
12. Do you believe that skipping classes is no problem  
yes [6] no [19] no ans. [1]
13. Should the professor give credits to students who merely pass paper exams?  
yes [8] no [18]
14. Are today's students less able to think and judge for themselves?  
yes [13] no [13]
15. Do students come to school to learn? [19] or simply to waste time? [7]

16. Should Universities make grading systems clearer and stricter?  
yes [19] no [7]
17. Are today's students less innovative, less creative, have less thirst for knowledge?  
yes [19] no [7]
18. Should educational reforms emphasize creativity and respect for the individual?  
yes [23] no [3]
19. Did you actually expect to pass the class with out actually attending the class?  
yes [12] no [14]
20. Do Japanese students intellectually support and lead Japanese society?  
yes [9] no [17]
21. Knowledge that comes from experience more valuable than knowledge that doesn't?  
yes [22] no [4]
22. The ultimate goal of test preparation to get into college will have to change?  
yes [21] no [5]
23. Are Japan's young people are Japan's most precious natural resource  
yes [17] no [9]
24. Japan's young people the most effective in making long term change in Japan's society?  
yes [16] no [10]
25. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university students?  
good [0] so so [17] bad [9]
26. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university ?  
good [2] so so [18] bad [5] [1]

APPENDIX D  
MIXED CLASS GAKUSHUIN UNIVERSITY

1. Did you read the articles on the need to reform Japanese Universities?  
yes [2] no [ 5]
2. Did you think there is a need to reform Japanese Universities?  
yes [6] no [1]
3. Did you think Japanese Universities can reform quickly?  
yes [3] no [4]
4. Did you think Japanese Universities students can reform quickly?  
yes [0] no [7]
5. Did you think Japanese Universities students are lazy?  
yes [7] no [0]
6. Did you think Japanese Universities students study hard  
yes [2] no [5]
7. Do you feel there a sense of crisis in the universities in Japan  
yes [5] no [2]
8. Will you enter graduate school? yes [2] no [5]
9. Are you involved in club activities? yes [2] no [5]
10. Should Japanese universities make entering easy and graduating  
difficult? yes [4] no [3]
11. College is not the place to learn but collage is a place to play a leisure  
land? yes [1] no [6]
12. Do you believe that skipping classes is no problem?  
yes [2] no [5]
13. Should the professor give credits to students who merely pass paper  
exams? yes [2] no [5]
14. Are today's students less able to think and judge for themselves?  
yes [4] no [3]

15. Do students come to school to learn? [5] or simply to waste time? [1] no  
ans. [1]
16. Should Universities make grading systems clearer and stricter?  
yes [4] no [3]
17. Are today's students less innovative, less creative, have less thirst for  
knowledge? yes [6] no [1]
18. Should educational reforms emphasize creativity and respect for the  
individual? yes [7] no [0]
19. Did you actually expect to pass the class with out actually attending the  
class? yes [4] no [3]
20. Do Japanese students intellectually support and lead Japanese society?  
yes [1] no [5] no a [1]
21. Knowledge that comes from experience more valuable than knowledge  
that doesn't? yes [6] no [1]
22. The ultimate goal of test preparation to get into college will have to  
change? yes [5] no [2]
23. Are Japan's young people are Japan's most precious natural resource?  
yes [6] no [1]
24. Japan's young people the most effective in making long term change in  
Japan's society? yes [6] no [1]
25. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university students?  
good [0] so so [6] bad [1]
26. In your opinion what is the quality of today's university ?  
good [0] so so [5] bad [2]