

ACTION PLAN 2012

- ▶ Aiming to be a University of Excellence in Education
- ▶ Responding to the Diverse Needs of Diverse Students

The Open University of Japan Action Plan 2012

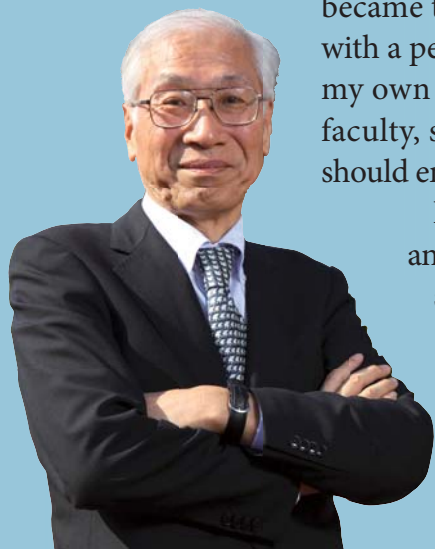


ACTION PLAN 2012

This Action Plan presents the medium-term vision for the future of the Open University of Japan (OUJ), so that faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders will be able to share the vision. Action Plan 2012, the first plan to be formulated since I became the President in May 2011, is intended to serve as a future vision for action with a perspective extending several years to cover my term of office. While based on my own conception, Action Plan 2012 was also developed through dialogue with faculty, staff, and students. I see it as a guide for actions that our faculty and staff should engage in, working together as one, in the time ahead.

In April 2013, OUJ will mark the 30th anniversary of its establishment. Japan and the world have undergone rapid change in these past three decades, and the social environment of OUJ has also experienced major changes. It will be extremely important for us to accurately perceive the present situation of OUJ and, on that basis, to discern how to affirm our own *raison d'être*.

The Open University of Japan
President **Yoichi Okabe**



I Basic Principles

OUJ is a distance education university where people can study mainly through television, radio, and the Internet. As indicated by its name, it is a publicly open university that is accessible to anybody who wishes to delve into higher education.

OUJ was established in April 1983 as a distance education university offering education mainly through television and radio, and over a quarter of the century since, we have been producing large numbers of graduates with degrees or other forms of recognition. The full transition to terrestrial digital television broadcasting in 2006 as well as the initiation of BS satellite digital broadcasting in 2011 has increased students' access and has also been raising public recognition at large. OUJ has been utilizing broadcast media to provide distance education to students at any time and any location. Now, the complementary use of information and communication

technologies (ICT) that have advanced so rapidly in recent years is making it possible to offer further enhanced education. It is in the last several years that the necessity for the use of ICT has come to be strongly recognized at OUJ and has begun to act as a driving force for a change here. We have instituted the System WAKABA administrative system online, mid-term assignment submission system online, and streaming video of many television lecture programs online. Now we have finally reached the stage where the technological infrastructure for teaching and learning is coming into place.

Considering these advances in technology, Action Plan 2012 sets forth two master plans and ten specific action plans as directions that should be pursued and tasks that should be achieved. These are presented as follows.



**Aiming to be a University of Excellence
in Education**

**Responding to the Diverse Needs of
Diverse Students**

放送大学
**THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
OF JAPAN**

II Two Master Plans

1. Aiming to be a University of Excellence in Education

This means that the basic direction that OUJ should pursue in the future is to become a university of excellence in education. This is our fundamental strategy to make OUJ distinct among the multitude of universities in Japan. To be a unique and distinct university in its own way means to become a university of excellence in education that stands on the solid research carried out by individual faculty members while bringing the concerns of education to the fore.

Speaking of “openness,” there are two kinds of openness at OUJ. One signifies the Open Education aspect of the university in which higher education is accessible to all without imposing any entrance examination requirement. This should not need any particular explanation. The other is the openness in terms of Open Educational Resources (OER), the provision and utilization of instructional materials at no charge, which has been attracting worldwide attention in recent years. OUJ makes all broadcast instructional materials publicly available for free as they are broadcast over public airwaves. In other words, we have implemented OER from our inception as a university. This makes OUJ a rare university in Japan. On these two points, OUJ is always unique not only among Japanese universities but also among those in the world. As we see it, however, our

aim to become a university of excellence in education will be realized when we take these two kinds of openness still further forward. We have a number of specific action plans to that end, and they are presented in the following.

2. Responding to the Diverse Needs of Diverse Students

The students of OUJ come from a wide range of age groups as well as from diverse occupational and other backgrounds. Consequently, our students present extremely diverse needs. A fundamental mission of OUJ is to create ways of meeting those diverse needs as much as possible. As one method of creating those ways, we have placed many Study Centers throughout Japan, but we need to further improve the functionality of those centers. The Study Centers are valuable facilities where students and faculty members can meet face to face, and are considered as crucial pillars that uphold education at OUJ.

On the other hand, considering that there are students who live on isolated islands and other locations far from any Study Center, and disabled students who are unable to easily get to a Study Center, there are also certain respects in which improvement of the Study Centers alone will be insufficient. Even students who are close to a Study Center may not

spend their time at the Study Center when they are taking broadcast courses. Instead, they have no choice but to study in relative isolation and view and listen to broadcast programs. We will therefore have to improve our virtual campus for student interaction. By using the Internet, we can

bridge the communication gap that the Study Centers alone cannot make up for, by means of e-mail, discussion boards, and other such systems. This will make it possible to resolve the loneliness felt by students who cannot make their way to a Study Center often enough to interact with other students.

Ten Specific Action Plans

1. Curriculum Improvement

We will comprehensively reexamine the curricula of Liberal Arts at OIJ, not just for broadcast courses but also for face-to-face schooling courses. This will include the measures taken at OIJ in recent years to add subjects related to the acquisition of certificates, to institute new courses, and to increase the number of credits that can be transferred to and from other universities. We will have the kind of breadth appropriate to a Faculty of Liberal Arts and reconstruct our curricula to enable systematic, cumulative learning for students.

We will give our basic courses titles that are in line with the frameworks of knowledge in each field so that they will be more readily understandable. Continuing those frameworks will maintain the stability of our curricula while at the same time clarifying the positioning of specialized and applied courses. We will also use face-to-face schooling classes for presentations, theses, and other kinds of training that are not easy to implement in broadcast classes. The overall curricula will be made appropriate for a Faculty of Liberal Arts, and arrangements will be made to increase the choice in selecting courses, as well. In other words, we will explore modes of curricula that make learning easier for students and teaching more fulfilling for faculty members, and we will achieve them.

2. Improvement of Instructional Materials

We will strive to further improve the quality of broadcast and print instructional materials.

As for broadcast instructional materials, the instructors and production staff will closely collaborate to establish methods for producing instructional materials that further enhance the students' understanding, and will build a system for producing high-quality broadcast instructional materials. We will also provide an environment that still further enhances the ease of learning with broadcast instruction materials by increasing the use of the Internet along with digital broadcasting.

We will also reexamine the process of making print materials, from the stage of writing the manuscript to that of printing, proofing, and distributing to the students. We will make it possible to create and to distribute print materials that are of better quality, both in their form and in their content. For example, by allowing ample time for proofreading, we will minimize errors. We will also make an arrangement so that third party advice can be obtained as part of faculty development (FD) during the proofreading stage. The aim of this arrangement is to create instructional materials that take the student perspective into consideration. We will also create a system for making some print materials available on the Web and take other such measures for the purpose of giving sufficient information about the content of the courses to students before they enroll in those courses.

3. Enhancement of Learning Support through Digital Media

Efforts to assure interactivity in teaching and learning to complement students' self-directed learning of broadcast instructional materials and print materials so far consist primarily of correspondence tutorials and questionnaires. We will use the Internet and other technologies to further enhance teaching and learning and make those tutorials and questionnaires more interactive. While we make arrangements to support autonomous learning by students, we will also take steps to provide more finely tailored guidance and to lighten the increased burden on faculty members by introducing a teaching assistant (TA) system.

We will also improve supplementary instructional materials and efficiently unify the various different learning support methods. As matters stand at present, there are many students who do not make use of information and communication technology (ICT). We will address this issue by providing face-to-face schooling and broadcast courses as well as volunteer workshops run by students themselves as ways to provide introductory ICT literacy education.

4. Exploration and Utilization of New Educational Methods

At most universities, the improvement of teaching is largely a matter of individual faculty members' efforts. At OIJ, however, it is relatively easy and effective to achieve group improvement. This is because OIJ's lecture contents exist in the form of video and audio recordings, and these are not just created by full-time faculty members, but also by numerous adjunct part-time faculty members who are experts in their respective fields. Due to this fact, a great diversity of educational methods accumulates at OIJ.

Alongside with the accumulation of past instructional materials and objects, various educational methods are also accumulated, and succeeding materials are prepared in that light. Therefore, increasingly improved educational methods can be achieved as a result. This kind of feedback loop is achieved by more than just accumulation of materials and methods. The use of enhanced materials and methods will be promoted by making them structured and visible and will be utilized for faculty development (FD).

5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement of the Graduate School

We will establish the doctoral program that OIJ has sought for so long, taking the diverse and abundant knowledge in the Faculty of Liberal Arts as the base for implementing a highly selective doctoral program of a kind possible only at OIJ.

At the same time, we will also improve the curricula for the master's programs, enabling students to effectively articulate their own thinking, to acquire the technical skills for conducting research, and to systematically master the process up to writing their own theses. Guidance in conducting research will not be limited to just between faculty members and students. As the educational outcome will be heightened by interaction with diverse people, we will create an environment centered on seminars where students and alumni can communicate and interact among themselves.

6. Provision of Flexible Opportunities for Active Use of Characteristics as an Open University

OIJ students tend to be working adults and take longer to complete their studies. It is also necessary, therefore, to devise ways of sustaining their motivation to study. OIJ has already adopted an Expert certification system that has become a model for universities throughout Japan. In addition to that, however, we will motivate students to continue studying by

methods such as providing special OIJ certification of credits to students who have already acquired one-half the number of credits needed to obtain a degree. OIJ presently accepts students who do not have a high school diploma. For these and other such students who are not yet adequately prepared for a university education, we will develop instructional materials for freshmen education as well as preparatory education, and other supplementary materials for tutoring and make-up study that utilize the Internet.

We will also take steps so that OIJ students who are working or raising children, and who are ill or disabled will not be disadvantaged. We will, therefore, offer morning and evening hour classes for face-to-face schooling, provide Braille support, place subtitles on television instructional materials, and provide special assistance for final exams and face-to-face classes, including active use of the Internet and other finely tailored assistive services.

7. Expansion and Enhancement of Study Center Functions

Considering the fact that Study Centers play the role of university campus for OIJ students, we will take steps to further enhance student life. We will move away from using Study Centers simply for face-to-face classes and course completion certification examinations, and utilize Study Centers to increase opportunities for students of different backgrounds and generations to interact. This will provide a multiplier effect by which we aim to heighten the students' motivation to pursue and complete their studies.

We will develop a new system for student consultation about their studies. In order to satisfy the abundant intellectual curiosity of our students, we will increase their opportunities to consult with Study Center directors and visiting instructors about their studies. When full-time faculty members from the headquarters visit the Study Centers for face-to-face classes, we will also set up opportunities for consultation about studies with them. We will further develop a system whereby full-time faculty members from the headquarters will go to the Study Centers to realize student needs with regard to OIJ. A peer support mechanism will also be developed so that OIJ students can help each other with their studies.

Even though these functional improvements are made to the Study Centers, there will still be some students who are unable to visit a center frequently because they live on isolated islands or other remote locations, or because of their work or other obligations. In order to bridge the communication gap with students like these, we will work to develop a virtual campus using communication tools on the Internet such as social networking services (SNS) and discussion boards on the Learning Management System (LMS).

8. Local Leader Development Support and Local Community Contributions by Study Centers

Large parts of the populations in local communities are aging, and regional societies are growing more diverse and more sophisticated. These changes in communities and regions must be addressed, and we will position our Study Centers as centers for lifetime learning in their communities. We will plan face-to-face schooling courses, public lectures, study tours, and other activities from a broad perspective, and we will provide support for extracurricular activities and other programs aimed at achieving collaboration with local communities, so that the Study Centers can fulfill their roles not just as places where we support learning, but as places where members of local communities can feel at home.

We will also make the effort to support development of leaders who will be able to engage in building prosperous, livable communities where people with different backgrounds can coexist. Using these and other means, we will explore new roles for the OUJ Study Centers in an aging society.

9. Enhancement of Library and Information Services

We will maintain the breadth and depth of education at OUJ while also responding to diverse learning needs of our students. For that purpose, the library plays a major role in supporting teaching and learning. We will proceed to expand our home delivery services, to enable all types of applications and requests to be placed online, to adopt reference services at a distance, and to provide other library and information services that are rooted in their users' needs. These efforts will coordinate traditional bricks-and-mortar library services

with outreach services, moving toward development of a system that supports learning by anyone at any time and at any location.

We will also expand OUJ holdings of digital materials, improve our search and retrieval tools, digitize necessary information for study, and improve the environment for accessibility. In general, we will upgrade our digital library functionality in order to contribute to the effective use of library resources across the wide range of fields and subjects needed by our students nationwide.

10. Promotion of Internationalization

Students are taking an increasing interest in international matters. We will, therefore, join with open universities in other countries to seek mutual agreements in expanding educational opportunities for their students and ours. To that end, we will explore possibilities for joint development or translation of instructional materials. We will also respond to overseas needs for training Japanese language teachers and doing research on Japan by developing instruction materials designed for international students before their arrival in Japan. By doing so, we will strive to actively disseminate OUJ education and instructional materials and to make an international contribution.

Making international contributions to open universities around the world is becoming a matter of great importance. In 2012, we will host the annual conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) at OUJ. As a member of the global community of open universities, we will take active part in the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) and the AAOU, thus heightening our international presence and contributing to improvement of the open universities' role in the world.