

Research Administration in Japan

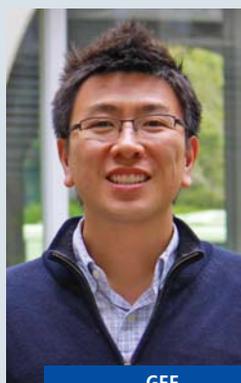
International University Research Administrators

By Keiko Okano

As young as the Japanese URA system is, we are fortunate to already have some colleagues from overseas. Their number is growing slowly but steadily. For this issue, I asked them to tell us how they came to Japan and became URAs, what they do, and what it is like to be an international URA in Japan.



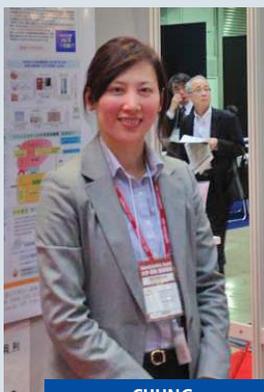
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Harold Kusters

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I had a passion for Japan since I was young, so doing Japanese Studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands was a logical choice for me. After graduation, I was awarded a scholarship to study Japanese Linguistics and Education at Hiroshima University from which I graduated with a Ph.D. in 2003. After working at Mazda Motor Corporation for 5 years, I returned to Hiroshima University to work as a coordinator for University-Industry-Government Collaborations. Here I first encountered Research Administration when I supported researchers to submit proposals to funding agencies. In October 2012 I applied for the current position as research administrator at Kyushu University, in Fukuoka, Japan.

My role as a research administrator at Kyushu University is to establish the infrastructure to apply for foreign sponsored research. I also coordinate joint research between the university and foreign organizations. As an example, I support the administration of research between the International Institute for Carbon-Neutral Energy Research ("ICNER") and a satellite established on the Illinois University campus for the promotion of international research.

Working as a research administrator in Japan has some challenges like the Japanese language and a culturally different working environment. However, the biggest challenge is the recognition as a research administrator, since the concept is rather new in Japan. It would be nice to have exchanges of research administrators between NCURA and a future Japanese counterpart to learn from each other's experiences.

Kristian Bering

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I am a Danish citizen with an academic background in early modern Japanese Literature. After about 16 years in Japan in total, I now speak, read and write Japanese on a level that allows me to feel comfortable working in a fully Japanese environment on equal terms with my Japanese colleagues at Osaka University.

In spite of my thoroughly humanist background, I decided to venture into the completely different area of innovation and triple-helix collaboration in 2009, when I joined Osaka University's Office for University-Industry Collaboration (UIC) as a coordinator with responsibilities for planning and promotion of

(URAs) in Japan

international collaborations. Initially, my responsibilities centered on administrative tasks relating to symposia and workshops, but gradually I became involved in marketing and basic technology transfer functions.

Last year in November I moved into my present position as a research administrator (URA) at Osaka University's Support Office for Large Scale Education and Research Projects (LSERP). The move from UIC to LSERP came about as a result of a need to renew my contract with the UIC and I seized a welcome opportunity to become involved in the important task of supporting research in the humanities. My mission is dedicated to research administration work that strengthens the humanities and social sciences, and to do so I focus on support and promotion of interdisciplinary research and international collaborations that center on the human dimension.

Peter Gee

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After obtaining my Ph.D. in virology from Kyoto University, Japan in 2013, I began to explore new career opportunities away from the bench. Fortunately, I found a research administrator position in the public relations department at Kyoto University's Institute for Integrated Cell-Material Sciences (iCeMS) soon after I graduated — a center established with the support of the Japanese Ministry of Education to break new ground in research and to recruit top-level scientists from around the world.

As part of a dynamic and motivated team, our main responsibilities include increasing the global visibility of iCeMS by highlighting key research findings, which are published in high impact factor journals, and distributing press releases to international news outlets. The challenge to convey complex research that targets a lay audience, while difficult at times, has been a rewarding experience. This position has also given me the opportunity to stay involved in science while working closely with researchers to ensure that the information we are disseminating is accurate and distributed in a timely manner.

Now is an exciting time to be a research administrator in Japan, especially at Kyoto University, where we are pioneering new efforts to accelerate and support research activities.

Ho Le Chung

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Before coming to Japan, I graduated from the Hanoi National University-University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Faculty of Ori-

ental Studies, where I learned about Japan comprehensively, including Japanese language, economic history, culture, and political system for 4 years. In October, 2002 I received a scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education for studying English education as a research student at Gifu University. Then I continued my study at the same university for my master's and doctoral degree, in Regional Studies and in Agricultural Sciences, respectively. After receiving the doctoral degree, I worked there as a research staff until March, 2012. I received an offer from Gifu University and started working as a URA in the Department of Research Promotion, Organization for Research and Community Development in April, 2013.

I have been in charge of the investigation and analysis of collaborative activities with local governments in Gifu Prefecture and external funding of Gifu University, assisting some joint research between Vietnamese research institutes and Gifu University. Currently I'm taking part in planning a joint research projects between the Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture and Gifu University. I think that working in Japan as a URA lets you make good use of your experience and connections, which is very enjoyable and fulfilling.

Shwu-Jen (Suzan) Wang

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After I earned my Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Tokyo, I worked as a director of the Integrated System Design Environment R&D Center in a city university. I did both pre- and post-award works, from applying for funding and domestic/international patents to organizing research projects and international conferences. These experiences provided me with a valuable asset as a URA. I also learned the importance of cross-national partnerships as an effective way to promote research and to motivate researchers to bring their research standards to a global level.

Next I took a position as a project manager at a national graduate university. Then, when the Minister of Education and Technology started the URA system, an opportunity opened up for me to join Kyushu University as a URA. At this renowned national university, I gained experience of starting big projects, like the ones that can benefit the entire research community at the university. I also had the chance to work on projects involving research indicators and outcomes, assisting research from various approaches.

I then transferred to Tsukuba University as a senior URA. My goal at this new position is to propose and implement structural changes to the research environment of the university, so that it will be able to achieve unprecedented results. I believe that creating truly transdisciplinary researches will be the next big challenge we will have to address, among many other issues that the Asian research community currently faces. ■