

How OCU* Can Avoid Oblivion, Survive, and Perhaps Even Flourish

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Abstract

Like many other universities, Okinawa Christian University faces major external and internal challenges. This paper outlines these major challenges and proposes concrete steps in response, to increase the chances that the university will be a valuable part of Okinawa's future, by utilizing its present academic strengths found in each academic division, by fundamentally rethinking what it means to be a functioning and viable center of learning for a growing diversity of people and by adopting the method of continual innovation and refinement.

OCU, like other universities in the early 21st century, is facing important external and internal challenges that will either make or break it. I suggest theoretical, organizational, and practical ways to avert what will be a perfect storm scenario for the university, because of these challenges, outlined and described in this article. The implication here is that unless the university adapts to external challenges and retools itself through a deep re-organization and adopts a continually emerging cluster of innovative initiatives, to overcome internal challenges, including routine ways of thinking, the university will bumble along until it falters or implodes.

This either-or dilemma seems a bit sensational; after all, each year, a new crop of undergraduates is duly inducted each April at the start of the new academic year. Speeches are made, photos are taken, brochures and flyers are distributed, instructions and workshops are given, songs are sung, prayers are offered, staff and instructors are trotted out to the view of hopeful students, nervous relatives, and interested well-wishers from the larger community. One semester follows another; everything occurs as it has done so for years, now decades. One of the most popular fallacies, however, is that change, particularly large and

enduring change, will not occur, at least not soon; however, at some point, incremental causes do accumulate, leading to qualitative consequences. Ways of organizing, ways of thinking, ways of doing things at the university have become routine, repetitive, unswerving, that is, until internal difficulties and external forces impede. Just last year, Hakubun Shimomura, Education Minister under the Abe government, requested all national universities to reduce enrollments — and by implication, support staff and instructors — for all humanities and social sciences divisions. (Glover) Though this top-down directive has met with resistance and outright refusal from some of Japan's best universities, the directive may also have an underlying economic element: some universities are operating with too few students, primarily caused by lower birth rates of the last decades and already high rates of college-educated young people within the traditional age for studying at university. Let's consider the declining demographics of Japan, an external factor.

The current and persisting declining demographic trend in Japan is well-known and, for the time being, inexorable. (“Japan Population Declines”) Though Okinawa Prefecture shows a more robust rate of population growth, it too

will follow the national path toward declining birth rates and rising rates of seniors. The working age population in Okinawa has already started to decline. (Shima) At the same time, the demographic of the university applicant pool retains its narrow slice of 17- to 19-year olds fresh from — mostly local - high schools. Each year, university recruitment efforts send faculty and staffers to high schools to troll for prospective students; in turn, busloads of high school students are brought to campus and given information and fed pizza to entice them to apply; much energy and thought are expended in this recruitment effort, yet quotas are more and more difficult to fill. At the same time, Japan already enjoys one of the highest percentages of university-educated citizenry, nearly 55 percent, (Montgomery) exacerbating the problem of a dwindling populace. Other universities, some state, others private, throughout Japan, are feeling the same number crunch and are finding their own ways of staying solvent, such as internal restructuring, merging or eliminating departments, reducing full-time staff and faculty positions, hiring more part-timers, recruiting more students from other prefectures, and increasing the number of foreign students to their enrollments. OCU does enjoy some few students from mainland Japan and some few international students, but OCU is and has been since its inception, a decidedly local university with positive local appeal.

Because of these general demographic trends and because of the provincial positive appeal of 'kiri-gaku', I suggest that the university open its doors to additional parts of the Okinawan demographic, at the same time increasing its efforts to deepen exchange programs and recruit students from the mainland and from abroad. Should this broadening of the demographic be anything other than an occasional anomaly, as it presently is? After all, studying at university is really for

younger people in their late teens, early twenties. Taking a degree or a certificate at university occurs only at a certain time in a person's life, one of the rites of passage for the young and qualified; once that period is over, that rite may not be re-invoked. As well, young people study first, then find work, marry, have children. Wrong on all counts!

Thinking of learning in a segmented, regimented way may appeal to a machinist concerned with having a certain number of widgets for the production line. However, much has changed in education, not only in terms of teaching and learning theories, but also just who is studying. Adult learning - I should say, life-long learning - has become a growing phenomenon of our uncertain and dynamic economy, our rapidly changing social reality, and people's deepening needs for personal fulfillment and for a more sophisticated, enduring happiness through learning; this growing phenomenon offers a unique opportunity to the university. If the university does not find ways to accommodate this global trend in learning at any time in a person's adult life, with or without young children to consider, with or without a current job or job prospect, the university will either miss a vital chance to be academically and socially relevant or fail entirely by missing the chance to be part of the future, where learning is continual, frenetic, and pervasive. The form and substance of the university at present is a picture of the past, not the future.

Gone are the days of completing a degree and finding a company offering life-long employment, working for 30 or 40 years and retiring with a modest but solid retirement package by which to enjoy the golden years of life. Instead, prospective working people face an uncertain future, often having to cobble together several part-time jobs, compelled to work for limited contracts with no

chance of renewal with very limited or no pension, or no job at all, despite having a high school or even a university education. Working people often find themselves between jobs or struggling to develop new skill sets, to give them a better chance to survive, perhaps even thrive, in a highly changeable economy. As well, some younger people find themselves with children before starting or while completing a degree. Further, students with disabilities had, until fairly recently, found it quite difficult to attend and be included in undergraduate life. Thankfully, some few students already fit these categories, and their numbers could help to obviate declining enrollments due to the natural decline in population. However, accommodating such students, mentioned above, will require innovation, planning, work, and thoughtful action.

OCU/OCJC – A small but strong suit

Okinawa Christian University currently offers a very small but strong collection of skill sets, formalized into degree paths: English Communication for the 4-year degree, along with a very small graduate division in Intercultural Communication; Oral English, for the 2-year degree; and Early Childcare and Education, for the 2-year degree as well. All of these degree paths can benefit by appealing to a growing number of non-traditional learners; adult and non-traditional students attracted to OCU/OCJC will also benefit the university and the traditional cadre of undergraduates and help to change the way the university is currently arranged. Yet how can any such change take place? After all, what can the university do?

Start with Your Strengths: Let English and Early Childhood Development Open the Door to New Learners, New Possibilities

The answers to the how and what questions mentioned above depend on our ability to see the fuller potential of what the university already

possesses, rather than trying to extend to other degree paths. English as a Second Language is a *forte* of OCU and offers the first best chance of pushing that metaphorical door open to non-traditional learners.

Currently, within Okinawan society, each year, hundreds of students of all ages, from teens to mid-age to seniors, have been accessing intensive and well-organized English-language courses within what is called the Bridge Program of the University of Maryland University College, or UMUC Asia, which has been in Japan for several decades, teaching undergraduate and graduate-level courses to US service personnel and their dependents. In the UMUC Bridge Program, however, mostly all students, with some few exceptions, are Japanese students, in Okinawa and elsewhere where there are high concentrations of US service personnel, who are attending writing and oral communication classes in 8-week blocks, throughout the year, allowing participants to move from course to course at their own rate, some electing to move straight through the 5-course program in one year, while others elect to specialize in one or two courses they feel they need or want most. The current tuition for each 8-week course is just over 70,000 JPY, while the entire Bridge Program package, which leads to a Certificate, presently costs students 468,855 JPY, (UMUC Asia Bridge Program) no small sum – approximately half of a 4-year degree at OCU.

Though Okinawa is awash with private language schools specializing in English and ‘ju-ku’ (cram schools) abound, with many a tutor for English, preceding each 8-week term, several score of highly motivated people with at least the Ei-Ken 2-level of English proficiency, a TOEFL ITP score of at least 450, and with a credit or debit card in hand, enter the Bridge Program and either complete all or some of the courses, as they wish or need. What

is lacking in Okinawa is a professional, structured program for people who have, for whatever reason, missed mastering English for professional, academic, or personal reasons. English ability is certainly not a magic wand leading to instant success or fulfillment, but enough people want or need such a professional environment; why couldn't that nexus for learning have strong Okinawan roots? OCU could be such a center in Okinawa. The Bridge enrollments are robust and will increase, as they are basically the 'only show in town'. What a wonderful chance OCU has to match or to develop their own unique program. How would such a program be developed?

OCU is a busy place sometimes, but often not; the campus is utilized as a facility during the mornings and afternoons and a few evenings for special events; however, more often than not, after normal class days and on most weekends, including summer holidays and winter, the campus is quiet. Why not make use of the quiet times for an English language program with running enrollment, for adult and non-traditional learners?

OCU is already established in Okinawa; it certainly hasn't the highest ranking among the colleges, not even in Okinawa, but OCU is widely known and is well-liked in Okinawan society. Nearly everyone in Okinawa seems to know someone who has either attended or is thinking about attending the university. The OCU branding as a center for English study is already in place; now, it needs to be utilized and sharpened for specific purposes.

Let us envision an English institute within OCU, with a related but independent management to direct its daily activities such as recruiting, scheduling classes, contracting qualified instructors, marketing, as well as long-range planning. The institute, let's provisionally call it 'English Institute for Busy People'—EIBP - would

have its own budget and work out an institutional relationship with OCU, allowing EIBP to utilize OCU facilities, such as designated classrooms, available technology (Internet access projectors, in-class computers, tv monitors, DVD-players, etc.), electricity, as well as existing security and cleaning staff. Classes would be held after OCU classes have filtered out and on weekends and summer and winter holidays. The Institute would have its own office at the college - nothing large, perhaps utilizing one of the most physically accessible parts of campus, to accommodate students with special needs; Shalom Building, the newest addition to OCU, would be the best place, as it is modern, bright, and already has easy access. The Institute would utilize OCU/OCJC faculty, requesting assistance in the way of staffing and course design. As well, capable and motivated students could be used as paid assistants. We could also make use of the newly adopted and free online LMS platform being developed for OCU classes. Security staff is already active, around the clock, on campus, and could be paid extra for their extra work, while classes are taking place. One of the major reasons why Japanese students are attracted to the UMUC Asia Bridge program is its ability to replicate the manner of a western university, particularly an American university, in terms of student-centered teaching styles, a friendly but rigorous attention to writing and speaking in class, a varied native or virtually native cluster of instructors from various countries, including Japan, a friendly, bilingual staff that assist students in ordering their texts, enrolling, providing general information for further study abroad, and career placement tips. If the Institute takes off, even the cafe at Shalom could consider a second shift.

The English Institute for Busy People would help non-traditional learners who really feel a desire or need to learn the language more deeply, to be functional at their work, travel, and personal life.

Both the university and the Institute would benefit from this reciprocal relationship, not only in terms of revenue, but also in OCU name recognition. The Institute would eventually generate its own revenue and indeed create more revenue with minimal adjustments to its structure, giving working professionals and non-traditional learners access to an existing professional teaching staff from various countries, thus strengthening participants' skills, as well as giving the current pool of instructors more work. What a wonderfully productive way to increase the student base and increase revenue. Of course, a small initial investment would be required, in order to get the program off the ground. However with thoughtful and precisely directed marketing and planning, the English Institute for Busy People could reach the same sorts of students that are currently drawn to the UMUC Asia Bridge program. Faculty and staff would be paid from the Institute's account, and some contribution from the English Institute to the university could be arranged, to handle extra costs for security, cleaning staff, and utilities. Any remaining revenue would be retained by the Institute, for future projects, marketing, and staffing. What a wonderful way to generate significant revenue and branding for the university as a university that opens its doors more widely to Okinawan society, a win-win situation for all.

As well, if the program becomes self-sustaining and revenue-generating in the surplus, those doors could well be somewhere other than the physical campus, since the OCU brand is an idea, not a physical location; the university is, therefore, ubiquitous, mobile. Such mobility would allow for an annex off campus, closer to higher concentrations of non-traditional learners who could enjoy taking classes in a location that is more centrally located. At first, this idea need not require purchasing, but renting office space that is highly visible and accessible, consistent with the

idea that education and educational facilities be more, rather than less, accessible.

Let the Little Kids Come to School

Okinawa Christian University has recently deepened institutional support for its Division of Early Childhood Care and Education. The deepening commitment to supporting this division of the university is the result of the solid achievements of the Division of Early Childhood Care and Education (DECCE). Given the trend toward replacing human workers with automation techniques and artificial intelligence, the university's renewed commitment to this division for childcare is fortuitous, since human services is one of the few sectors capable of employment growth. (Sawa) This deepening interest and support shows excellent judgment and discernment precisely at a time when more and more families in Okinawa need the assistance of well-trained undergraduates to staff existing facilities or to create their own child-care facilities, after graduation. How might the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development be effective in helping to push open the doors of the university and assist students and staff already associated with the university?

OCU Early Child-Care Center

OCU and its campus represent an excellent opportunity to link theory and practice in the field of early childhood care and education. Though students complete internships at venues off campus, why not found a licensed university child-care center, directly on campus? Founding a child-care center on campus within the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development would provide that link to practice (praxis) for undergraduates committed to that major. Having the day-care center directly on campus would give each new class of early childhood undergraduates a chance to apply what they have learned while they are

still under the guidance of the college and its professors. The idea of campus-based early child-care facilities is not new to Japan; however, such on-campus facilities in Japan are still a fairly rare phenomenon. However, on its Hongo Campus, Tokyo University houses its Hongo Keyaki Day Nursery; Nagoya University and Sophia University also have facilities. (Hongo Keyaki Day Nursery). More locally, in Onna-son, Okinawa Prefecture, OIST has created its own Tedako Pre-School (Childcare Facilities) for its graduate students, staff members, and professors with small children. More recently in Japan, companies, (Yan) hospitals, and senior homes have also followed suit, so the extension of early childcare facilities to university campuses is part of a growing trend. This trend becomes particularly prescient as a growing minority of people with younger children are also involved in caring for their elderly parents. (Otake)

OCU has a relatively small student base, but large enough to consider having a child-care center for the young children of administrative staff, instructors, and even the small but growing number of students with young children. Such a facility could also provide after-school services for the working adults and students with children. From this outsider's perspective, OCU has all the major parts:

- 1.) new college devoted to early childhood education
- 2.) proven track record of training undergraduates for early childhood education
- 3.) steady influx of eager undergraduates in need not only of theoretical understanding but also practical application of what they are learning
- 4.) young children of administrators, staff, faculty, and students

Costs

What the university does not have is a refurbished and child-friendly section of the campus to house the new childcare facility. To be sure, creating a suitable, modern childcare center will cost some money. After all, a safe and suitable area for the child-care center at OCU is required. Proper safety features as well as structural and interior design materials need to be integrated and should reflect the newest understanding of what young children would need and like for such a facility. Experts would not have to be hired for this, since the college has a host of experts in the division. The faculty could plan and develop the facility and work closely with the architect and company contracted to make any adjustments to that part of the existing university facility. As well, some thought needs to be given to any medical or nursing assistance for the young children. Presently, the university has a nursing staff-member on call; perhaps the existing nursing staff can expand to assist the new child-care center of OCU. Supplies for the child-care center would also represent part of the cost. As well, some additional money for administrative staffing would be needed for the director of the OCU child-care center.

Who would run the facility?

The college could hire a director for the child-care center; the director would develop activities and schedule interns, and work with professors on any integrated classes relating to the facility. Staffing for the child-care center would come primarily from the undergraduates; working at the center could be considered a professional internship and nexus for in-house research opportunities. If the program grows, some paid positions could be added; these positions as well could go to highly motivated undergraduates. Book-keeping, recording-keeping, and communication might also be done in-house; that is, existing administrative support could handle this part of the center,

working in tandem with the director of the child-care center.

How would the facility be regulated?

The OCU child-care center would abide by all existing laws and regulations for early child-care centers in Japan, as well as any university regulations. The university attorney would advise of any particular requirements consistent with Japanese law. Liability questions should be thoroughly researched, in consultation with a legal firm that specializes in advising licensed early childcare facilities.

Why does OCU need a child-care center?

Some administrators, staff, faculty, and students have young children, from 2 months to 6 years old. Having a place for the young children nearby their parents is a healthy and welcome feature of a contemporary work and study environment. Rather than racing youngsters to this or that child-care facility, parents of the university could simply come to campus with their children. During lunch or break, staff, faculty, or students could look in on their children. When it is time to go home, parents need not rush off to another facility, but can collect their children and head home. Parents can be consoled to know that their children are nearby and being cared-for by highly motivated undergraduates who are also studying in the field of early childhood care and development. As well, parents from the nearby community could also have access to the facility.

Would parents pay a fee for enrolling their children in the OCU child-care center?

The benefits so far outweigh the outlay described in this proposal that payment could be at or somewhat below market rates for Okinawa Prefecture, to cover administrative costs.

More information is required to assess the current and projected need for a child-care center

at the university. Some in-house canvassing of administration, staff, and student parent needs would be a way of generating some current information. This proposal, though rough and uninformed, could provide the impetus for the administrators and professors of the newly formed college to discuss the possibility in greater detail, perhaps as a campus symposium, for starters.

Having a childcare center at work or at university is not a new idea, but a growing and promising idea. The preschool of OCU could be a shining example of a highly professional licensed facility, one that is an integral part of the university and a service to all on campus and the immediate community. This facility would represent a bold and practical step for the university, one that would benefit the branding of the university, give its core faculty chances to apply their expertise, offer employees and students of OCU a chance to get - literally - hands-on experience in working with young children, and of course, give the young children some of the best care available.

Both the OCJC and OCU English programs and Early Childhood Education and Development can help to open the doors to the university; the ideas outlined are just a start. Yet more innovative thinking is needed, to solidify the future of OCU and to contribute materially to Okinawan society.

Castle on the Hill

The present campus, in Nishihara, lies on an unfortunate piece of real estate. With only one narrow entrance/exit and perched on a rocky hill, the campus offers little chance for further development and extension, yet that is just what is needed for long-range planning. First, the university should soberly assess its current physical holdings and property lines. Take note of all adjoining properties, assess each in terms of its future importance vis-a-vis the university, and find any opportunity to acquire adjoining

properties and land that would help to consolidate the university's presence. This process of assessment and thoughtful acquisition of adjoining properties and land would be an ongoing process. Presently, a new and wider highway 29 is being laid just a few hundred meters from the base of OCU campus. This recent development can be a real chance for the university to think its way forward, in terms of decades, not just months or semesters, in thoughtful purchasing of properties that would connect the campus to the major road being constructed. Doing so would allow for another entry and exit for the campus. This second entrance would allow for easier access to campus and would be highly recommended in case of emergency situations. A thorough assessment can be conducted with the help of safety and civil engineers as well as innovative architects experienced in creating more easily accessible facilities and areas for all. OCU could become a leader rather than a follower in providing for students with special needs, by making sure that existing access to the campus and to its structures are made more accessible and safer. Having control over adjoining properties would also give the university more influence in how local properties are developed, once the new road is completed.

Take down those walls, actual and virtual

Along with physical walls are organizational walls. OCU has only a few divisions, yet these few divisions suffer from the same problems that much larger universities endure: departmental separation, where each division, each discipline, has its own theoretical and physical center. These divisions are organizationally as well as physically represented. However, each division slides past the other, as do faculty, as do staff, as do students. To be sure, there is some rotation of administrative staff from one section to another. As well, there is some contact between OCU and OCJC, in terms of English instruction, but much less so with

Early Childhood Care and Education. C. P. Snow's famous 1959 lecture at Cambridge comes to mind. Snow was concerned about how the sciences and the humanities have created mutually exclusive theoretical worlds, separating groups that could otherwise profit from one another's different perspectives. OCU suffers a bit from this division; however, this division could be diminished by a fundamental re-thinking of how each division could help the other. This is already happening locally, at OIST, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology.

The recently created graduate university, OIST, is an example of how organizational wall-building found at most universities, has been largely avoided. Faculty at OIST indeed have offices but the offices are part of learning environments and study areas, not bunkered and sequestered, keeping some few instructors in, most others out. As well, students at OIST are free to and encouraged to interact with each other, regardless of discipline, allowing for new chances to benefit from the encounters. Could OCU take down the walls described? Yes, some of the walls could be taken down with jack-hammers; the virtual walls, however, require a fundamental rethinking of what faculty, staff, and students are doing at the university.

The University's Extended Family: Create an Alumni Association

As new students arrive, other students complete their degrees and depart the university, often for good, that is, never to return or keep in touch with their *alma mater*. Even if graduates wanted to stay in touch, they have no alumni association attached to the university to facilitate this connection. Giving all attention to potential and present students is a mistake, as graduates are really part of the OCU family, which grows larger by the year. Why not create an alumni association

within the university? (Broudy) Splurge and create a director position, along with some part-time paid assistantships for motivated students, to generate and maintain an alumni web site and monthly or quarterly newsletter of OCU activities and accomplishments.

Some OCU graduates do well in their chosen careers and might actually support the university, if given the chance, through grants or donations, scholarships, internships, or career mentoring. Given the chance, successful alumni might enjoy directing their generosity toward purchasing musical instruments, new computers, donating to the university library, to one of the university divisions, creating new events and contests for competing students, to name a few possibilities. Creating and maintaining an alumni association would offer OCU yet another way to continue to reach out to Okinawan society through its graduates. As well, graduates often have children and their children may want to go to the same university as their parents, not at all a bad tradition.

OCU could have a bright future if it realizes and utilizes its existing strengths in opening the academic doors to non-traditional learners, accommodating and attracting students with special needs, consolidating and extending its holdings (property, infrastructure), and earnestly invoking the idea of continual innovation, to make the university an enduring and positive part of Okinawan society. If OCU does none of the above, its future is, at best, precarious; if OCU does most or all of the above, the university has a chance to avoid oblivion, survive, and even flourish in the coming years.

Note: *OCU is only one part of the university. OCU or **Okinawa Christian University**, offers a four-year degree in English Communication and

also houses a **Graduate School of Intercultural Communication**; OCJC or **Okinawa Christian Junior College** offers a two-year degree in Oral Communication as well as a two-year degree in Early Childhood Care and Development. As of the writing of this article, OCU has 468 enrolled undergraduate students and 3 graduate students; OCJC has 185 enrolled students for its Oral English program and 234 students enrolled in its Early Childhood Care and Development program. 'OCU' is used throughout the article to refer to the entire institution. (Okinawa Christian University Main Office)

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沖縄キリスト教学院はいかに忘却を避け生き残り、 活躍できる可能性を見い出せるか

クリストファー メリー

要 約

多くの他大学がそうであるように沖縄キリスト教大学もまた内外的に深刻な難問に直面している。この論文はこうした深刻な難問を概説し、人々の多様性を育てる学びの実行可能な中心的存在とその機能を果たすということがどのようなことを意味するのかを根本的に再考し、そして、持続可能な改革と洗練された改善法を採用し、各学部によって見出された本大学が保有する学術的強みを活かすことにより、沖縄の未来の貴重な一部を本大学が担うという可能性を高める具体的な手順を提案する。