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Faculty members from Osaka University and Cal State Fullerton enjoy a reception held Oct. 1 following two weeks in which the Osaka visitors worked side-by-side with their Fullerton counterparts. Pictured, from left, front row, are Katherine Kantardjieff, Binod Tiwari and Barbara Gonzales; back row, Christopher Meyer, Ichiro Hisaki, Heiji Watanabe, Kiichi Fukui, Shigenori Kanaya, Marcelo Tolmasky and Yuichi Koga. Photo by Stephen Weissbart

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Studies in Language and Culture

Visiting Japanese Faculty Observe American Teaching Styles



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Five professors from Osaka University in Japan recently traveled great distances, both geographically and culturally, to interact with and learn from their American counterparts at Cal State Fullerton. They were the second group from Osaka University and the fifth delegation of faculty members from Japanese universities during the past two years to come to Cal State Fullerton for a faculty development program developed for professors who will be teaching courses in English.

While on campus, each professor from Osaka University's Division of Advanced Science and Biotechnology was paired with a mentor faculty member from Cal State Fullerton. Working in collaboration with the College of Natural Science and Mathematics, as well as the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the visiting professors spent two weeks working side-by-side with their Fullerton counterparts. The culmination of their work? Teaching a class to Cal State Fullerton students ... in English.

"These international, academic collaborations are important to our campus," said Harry Norman, dean of University Extended Education. "As global citizens, they allow us to share ideas and develop programs. Faculty members, as scholars and higher education professionals, seek ways to grow. During these exchanges, we have the unique opportunity to learn from one another."

The visiting professors observed the classrooms of their counterparts and saw how class sessions were managed. In addition, they attended classes that focus on how to create active-learning environments,

develop strategies for effective delivery of instruction, and how to encourage critical thinking skills in students. The visitors worked with their Fullerton peers to improve their English language skills, since as professors in the International Program for Frontier Biotechnology, which attracts students from around the world, instruction is in English.

“We hope to take these lessons back to our university and incorporate some of these techniques into their own teaching,” said Kiichi Fukui, professor of cell biology. “American styles of teaching are very different than ours. Professors here involve their students to a much greater extent than we do and I think that’s helpful for students. It keeps them engaged.

“We also will share these insights with our colleagues,” Fukui continued. “Our hope is to take the best of American teaching skills and add them to our coursework.”

“This was a great opportunity for us and very helpful,” said Ichiro Hisaki, a professor of organic chemistry. “We saw a lot of interaction between professors and students, as well as attempts to make the classroom environment comfortable for students.”

In contrast, Japanese universities offer a more traditional approach where professors lecture and student questions are held until the end of class.

“There is limited interaction,” said Heiji Watanabe, a professor of electronics. “Here, the faculty encourages questions and comments.”

“University Extended Education is actively working on developing more of these kinds of collaborations between Cal State Fullerton and universities from other countries,” said Norman.

A third faculty group from Osaka is expected in March.

Faculty participants from Cal State Fullerton and their Osaka associates include: • Nilay Patel, assistant professor of biological science, with Kiichi Fukui • Marcelo E. Tolmasky, professor of biological science, and Shigenori Kanaya • Binod Tiwari, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering, and Heiji Watanabe • Katherine Kantardjieff, professor of chemistry and biochemistry, Ichiro Hisaki • Chandra Srinivasan, associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry, and Christopher R. Meyer, professor of chemistry and biochemistry, paired with Yuichi Koga

Also working with the Osaka delegation were members of the American Language Program: Bruce Rubin, John Marshall and Cynthia Berteau. Melem Sharpe-Kwon is program manager on the Japanese faculty development programs.

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