

Summer Session and the University's Mission

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The activities of the American university are constantly being expanded and adapted as the knowledge base for which it is responsible — and the society to which it is accountable — change. The history of higher education in this country reflects a variety of forces which shaped our idea of what a college or university should be: From our early roots in the British idea of a classical education to the scholarly traditions of the German university; from the economically driven land-grant movement of the late 19th century to the post-World Wars expansion of university basic research to the current expansion of students in higher education due in part to a proliferation of diverse institutional forms and educational delivery modes. The American university, as conservative as it seems at any given moment, from the perspective of 250 years of history has been enormously dynamic and adaptable. Its dynamism and adaptability have made it a standard bearer throughout the world of how to combine simultaneously excellence in teaching, research and public service.

American institutions of higher education are still structured and financed on a 19th century model of education, however. This model assumes that the student and the faculty need discretionary time in the summer for vital economic and personal pursuits. It derives in large part from the exigencies of our 19th century agricultural economy which required the labor of the entire family for harvesting and planting before the winter chills set in.

Thus our institutions of higher education developed without a formal summer program and have always used the summer term differently than the more structured fall, winter and spring terms when students and faculty were assumed to be on campus, for the most part fulltime, fulfilling their responsibilities of teaching and learning.

Summertime at American colleges and universities has been until recently a sleepy time, a time when buildings got renovated, roads got repaired, faculty caught up on their reading for a new fall semester and the occasional researcher or highly motivated student was free to pursue scholarly interests in the field or in the lab.

The vast majority of students returned home to work in family enterprises or got summer jobs. The more affluent often just relaxed or vacationed in exotic places.

The challenging expansion of knowledge in the last few decades coupled with the incredible growth and diversification of the undergraduate student body are beginning to have significant implications for how we provide a meaningful higher education. In such a context summer has come to represent a different set of opportunities and contingencies for both students and the faculty than it once did. The character of academic life for faculty and the academic expectations and social and economic constraints confronting today's heterogeneous college students are quite different than the university world of the 1940s and 50s. As the university grapples with how to provide more knowledge to its students in more pedagogically diverse ways the summer quarter takes on a different significance in the lives of students and faculty. The mission of the summer session is no longer purely instrumental. It has become more than an administrative convenience through which courses which in a previous era were not funded by state budgets could be financed and offered. It represents increasingly a distinct opportunity to provide faculty and students with intellectual and research experiences not readily accommodated in the "regular" academic year.

As the mission of the American college and university is changing, so is the mission of its summer session. This article offers three key variables which have affected how universities are changing their approach to fulfilling their teaching, research and public service missions. These include the rapid transformation in the character and quantity of knowledge in all disciplines — traditional and emerging; shifting ideas about what students need to know and how they can best master differing bodies of knowledge; and the changing sociological characteristics of college students today. Taken together these variables represent interesting challenges and opportunities for formal summer session programs. Such programs need to

go beyond thinking of themselves as simply delivery mechanisms through which academic year programs are made available to students in the summer months and begin to see themselves as vital partners in the academic programming goals of their campuses because of their ability to provide substantively and pedagogically unique summer teaching and learning experiences.

THE MODERN UNIVERSITY: CHANGING CONTEXT

Research and Scholarship: Expansion

Four decades of broader social support for basic research and scholarship have resulted in a phenomenal expansion of the knowledge base. Fields ranging from biology to philosophy have experienced major paradigmatic shifts affecting both theory and methodology. This has been accompanied by a quantitative growth in specializations within fields which are characterized by increasingly esoteric forms of data and bodies of concepts. This proliferation of not just data but of theoretical and methodological perspectives is both a quantitative and a qualitative problem for the teacher and the learner. Increasingly, for example, one needs to be proficient at higher order mathematics in order to "do" undergraduate science, economics, or sociology. Increasingly, one needs more sociological knowledge of population trends and cultural differences in order to be educated for the various sub-fields of health, welfare or education. Increasingly, knowledge of regulatory law and practices or of special interest groups is tied to curricula in sub-fields of political science and public administration. There is more to be known in order to function at a basic level in a variety of fields and disciplines. This translates into the challenge of providing students with more "building blocks" in their basic education. As well, more versatility in conceptual and interpretive skills is needed. All of this is necessary to assure students will be lifelong learners, capable of updating and revising their ideas and skills as the knowledge base further expands throughout their lives.

A second dimension to this problem is that this expansion has resulted in a high level of specialization *within* academic fields and fragmentation *between* academic fields. This situation makes it more difficult for today's student to perceive, much less grasp, the important interconnections between developments in biology with ideas about gender, addiction or schizophrenia studies in the psychology department for example; about forms of literary analysis and interpretation as a result of

third-world texts now widely available in translation; about the history of the United States as a result of researches and literatures coming from women, native Americans, and foreigners who bring different texts, methodologies and perspectives to their scholarship. Students have enormous challenges integrating all these disparate forms of analysis, discourse and interpretation. The increasing remoteness of faculty from teaching is compounded by the over-specialized character of graduate education which today prepares young PhDs to find their place in a research specialization rather than in mastery of a field as a whole. The situation leaves undergraduate students with a new generation of faculty with very little interest in or capability with integrative thinking. Colleges and universities overall are facing enormous curricular challenges in the face of these shifts. Summer programs can help meet some of these challenges.

Finally, an additional by-product of the growth in both size and complexity of the knowledge base is the increased fragmentation between theory and research on the one hand and applied versus basic research on the other. The growing lack of interaction and discourse among academic constituencies committed to one approach or another can play itself out in the lives of students who may get exposure to one form but not another. Many faculty are looking for ways to integrate "hands-on" field or lab work into the educational experiences of their students. The constraints of time and facilities often make such efforts difficult in the context of the regular academic year but highly feasible as a single-focus summer program. Many fields would benefit from internships and on-site work experience not easily accommodated during the tightly scheduled academic year.

Thus, our universities are grappling with a number of issues in teaching and learning which are a direct outgrowth of a fragmented knowledge base; there is more to learn, there are more ways to learn, there is a need to integrate learning from diverse disciplines and there is a need to have learning experiences which introduce students to different "ways" or "methodologies" of knowing.

What Students Need to Know

A second parallel problem is simply "the list" of what students need to know to be literate and functional in an advanced industrial society. And here again the challenge is not simply the content they need to master but the approaches to teaching and learning which are potentially most productive of student mastery of that content.

In addition to the increased course requirements within the major field, general education requirements are shifting, making it more and more difficult for students to take all the courses they need for graduation in the typical two semester/four-year program. Students are increasingly being called upon to have knowledge of or proficiency in:

- Foreign languages
- World history, cultures and literatures
- Government and public affairs
- Literacy in science and technology
- Reading, writing and critical thinking
- Basic skills in work-related fields such as math, computer literacy, laboratory skills, skills in research libraries
- Use of public archives or data bases
- Skills working with children, sick people, or the elderly

The list could go on and on. What is critical is the challenging (as well as dazzling) range of skills, competencies and knowledge with which a student can leave a college or university. However, to truly have the time and flexibility to pursue such variety, students are seeking out more courses year-round and opportunities, often in the summer, for special learning experiences. Such learning experiences often represent a more effective way to become proficient in a body of knowledge than just sitting in a lecture class for ten to fifteen consecutive weeks. They include such things as:

- Immersion courses such as an eight-week, every day of the week intensive language experience
- Participation in an intensive interdisciplinary educational experience such as the politics, history and literature of Latin America
- Self-paced learning opportunities via computer and other learning technologies
- Focused research projects in the lab or in the field
- Fulltime internships or work study projects
- Performance workshops in the arts
- Foreign study / off-site study opportunities

Each of these represents an approach to learning which enriches the student experience and which are not always easily accommodated in the structure of faculty schedules and commitments during a regular semester but which are easily adapted to summer formats.

Changing Sociological Profile of Students

The third relevant variable affecting the modern university is the changing sociological profile of today's students.

There are more of them, they are more varied in age, sex, race and ethnicity as well as in their family and economic circumstances. The "collegiate experience" is no longer unidimensional. On virtually every campus — even our most traditional private, liberal arts colleges — one finds adult learners and part-time students; first generation immigrants and minorities; children from rich and poor backgrounds; persons who are not only students, but often parents and breadwinners simultaneously. Such a mix of students leads inevitably to a different orientation to the "college year." Increasingly students have the idea that one goes to school year-round; they feel it is legitimate to seek and find academic experiences in the summer that are equivalent to what can be found during the other parts of the year.

Another little-discussed characteristic of today's growing and diverse constituency for higher education is how mobile and dispersed it often is. A college or university represents in many areas a stable, reliable and welcoming social institution in the midst of a constantly changing community. Clearly it is foremost a center of learning — but it is also a center of community life and contemplation in a hectic world of freeways, shopping centers, fragmented subdivisions, and a declining number of mediating institutions. Students, therefore, like to be on campus, describe themselves as taking courses, as being an ongoing part of this stable community. "Going to school" is increasingly an identifying characteristic of American young adults and practically all of them are going to school even if only by taking one course at a time. This in turn affects the changing role of summer session in the life of its institution.

University Life: Summer Session's Increasingly Vital Role

In such a changing academic context the university's summer session takes on a new set of possibilities and functions for both faculty and students. Because of its history of being primarily a marginal adjunct to the "real" academic year, it has developed some flexibilities and institutional capabilities which in these changing times give it an attractiveness and potential for centrality unimagined even two decades ago.

The summer turns out to be the context in which innovation intellectually and pedagogically can take place. It turns out to be a context in which faculty can engage in teaching adventures and students in learning ones which would be unlikely in the context of the longer, more heavily scheduled academic term. Summer also provides

a context through which the institution as a whole can reaffirm its commitment to being an intellectual and cultural resource in its community as well as embark on programs which bring unique attention to the campus. The full realization of this potential, however, depends on the summer session, as well as the campus, seeing themselves as integral parts of the complex process of academic programming facing institutions of higher education as they move into the 21st century.

It is possible to frame summer sessions' potential academic service to the campus in three ways; for the students, for the faculty and for the good of the institution as a whole. Let us take a brief look at each.

In terms of students the benefits of summer programs extend beyond the obvious one of having courses available that were oversubscribed during the academic year. They relate directly to the points previously made about substance and pedagogy. It is possible for the student to have a qualitatively different educational experience in the summer because of the provision of unique substantive or pedagogical opportunities. For example, summer can substantively provide the context for interdisciplinary study in areas such as the environment, or Latin American studies, or women's studies. It can provide immersion experiences in such things as intensive language study or a master-class in a particular musical instrument. Summer can provide performance-focused experiences through comprehensive theater or dance seminars. It can provide opportunities for a full-time research experience in a hospital or biology lab, in an ethnic neighborhood, at a center for battered women, in the marketing department of a local business. It can provide work-study opportunities for students who want a firsthand experience of health care delivery or sales or computer programming. It can provide opportunities to study abroad, not just a language but in focused knowledge areas such as engineering in Scotland, theater in England, or childcare in Sweden. Through special focus institutes which draw students and faculty from many campuses on such issues as understanding poverty in America, or principles of entrepreneurship, it can give students access to students and faculty from other places as well as an opportunity to participate in a problem-focused study program. The flexibility of summer, administratively and financially, makes it possible to facilitate these sorts of diverse and meaningful academic experiences for students.

It can provide similar benefits to faculty. All too often we perceive faculty interest in summer session as tied only to a desire for a summer salary. However, summer represents an intellectually challenging opportunity for faculty and campus academic departments as well.

Summer is often the time to develop a new course or a new approach to teaching traditional material. It is also a potentially useful way to bring visiting professors and adjunct faculty into the campus community to enlarge the circle of colleagues in a department. The summer can also represent an opportunity for a professor to pursue a line of research with a group of students who are acting as research assistants while earning campus credit. The research may be in a campus lab or the local community but it could also be in Bolivia or the south of France. The travel study programs often make it possible for a professor to get abroad and remain there pursuing independent research or scholarship after the students complete their term. Finally, for professors, summer may be the one time when they can gather together a group of colleagues from disparate places to be part of an interdisciplinary program or discourse group which includes students. Summer session's administrative know-how and student tuition income can go a long way to facilitate these and similar faculty-generated initiatives.

Finally, summer session can contribute to a university's fulfillment of its public service role in its community and to its regional and national "positioning" through the provision of academic programs which bring recognition and appreciation to the campus as a whole. Highly focused academic programs like summer language institutes, science seminars for gifted students, or performing arts festivals which draw on students regionally or nationally enable a campus to demonstrate its strengths and emphases to the larger community. Programs of this type, which build on the particular campus' academic strengths, on those qualities for which it wants to become "best known," can build a constituency for the campus among professionals, among citizens and even within the media. Summer is a time when there is often more flexibility with regard to the use of campus facilities, faculty time, residence halls — and even parking. This flexibility coupled with innovative academic programs which simultaneously benefit students, faculty and the larger community, represent a unique contribution to the overall academic vitality of an institution.

Conclusion

For summer sessions to realize the kind of potential described in this essay requires more than just interested faculty, some flexibility with regard to the use of funds and facilities and a clear sense of institutional strengths and aspirations. It requires vigorous and intellectually engaged leadership from within the summer session itself.



In *Kabuki* all roles are played by men. The character "Umegawa" (left) is played by Nakamura Tomotaro while "Chubei" is performed by Nakamura Senjaku.



Scene from "*Koi Bikyaku Yamato Orai*" with Nakamura Senjaku as "Chubei" (kneeling) and Nakamura Tomotaro in the role of "Umegawa."

Summer Session 1988

provided Hawai'i students a unique opportunity to study makeup, costuming, singing, acting and production techniques of The Grand Kabuki of Japan in a course planned by the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Summer Session and conducted by Kabuki master Nakamura Senjaku. The course closed with the production of the Kabuki classic, "*Koi Bikyaku Yamato Orai*" (A Messenger of Love in Yamato), presented on the stage of the University's John F Kennedy Theatre — the only theatre in the United States designed to present Kabuki in its traditional stage format.

Photos by courtesy of Aileen J Yoshida.

There is a need among leaders of college and university summer sessions for a reinvigorated sense of mission and an expanded sense of possibilities particularly given the changing academic realities of the institutions of which we are a part. The mentality of many summer session directors — that "all we are is a delivery system for the campus" not only does the summer session a disservice but too often results in the absence of programs which both substantively and pedagogically serve the central academic mission of the campus.

Faculty and students are seeking ways to broaden and deepen the quality of their academic experience in light of the major shifts in knowledge and transformations in society confronting education today.

The summer session, far more than just an administrative mechanism, can be a vital part of the university's attempt to relate to these challenges and opportunities. Many campuses are already developing summer programs which are attempting to meet the challenges and opportunities.

What is sorely needed in the field of higher education research is a serious description and analysis of the character of such programs as well as the development of a body of case studies which could inform leadership in their field. Without some reflection on what we do and why, what works and doesn't, and the development of a useful data base of program ideas, summer sessions will not fully realize their potential to serve the academic missions of their campuses. America's students and faculty deserve the best we can offer and it is time to re-examine what that is in the context of the once peripheral but increasingly central university summer session.

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