Featured School:

Kyushu University

Kyushu University Business School (QBS)

Fukuoka, Kyushu, Japan

www.en.kyushu-u.ac.jp/BS/english/index.html

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Kyushu University Business School (QBS) was established in 2003 as one of a series of new professional graduate schools established at universities in Japan, and as the third such business school to be established in a national university. The business school’s mission and activities are focused on two themes: Asian business and technology management.

Associate Professor Megumi Takata, who served as co-director of the university’s Intellectual Property Management Center (IMAQ) Technology Transfer Group, likens the school’s seven-year history to the “start-up stage” of a new venture. For much of this time, the school’s focus has been on incorporating and delivering foundational courses related to innovation, building over time a curriculum that combines courses in general business fields with more specialized courses such as intellectual property management, technology development, risk management, or innovation management.

In the past year, QBS has taken actions to strengthen its investment in providing support for innovation, including adding a new course on creating a value-added business based on technology. To support this and other planned changes, Takata spent several months in residence at a flagship entrepreneurship center run by a U.S. business school, and visited several other business schools recognized for their commitment to innovation. He notes that this experience to observe effective practices in place at other schools was highly valuable in helping him to learn how to create courses on innovation and to accelerate the entrepreneurship aims of students.

The biggest shift for QBS revolves around current plans for the development of a new Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The center marks a new phase in the integration of activities that previously had been handled separately by multiple units.

One of these units was a Venture Business Laboratory (VBL) established by the university in 1995 to promote the development of innovative, interdisciplinary research into new business ventures. The center supported activities such as business plan competitions, marketable research competitions, and entrepreneurship seminars, and also provided support for innovative business research and ventures through the use of their facilities, postdoctoral fellowships, and grants for researchers.

To coincide with the 2003 establishment of QBS, an Intellectual Property Management Center (IMAQ) was created. The IMAQ’s roots were in an earlier unit supported by the university, the Kyushu University Advanced Science and Technology Center for Cooperative Research (KASTEC), which had been established in 1994 to implement university-industry collaborative projects. The creation of IMAQ enabled various administrative activities, including those supported by KASTEC and the VBL and those of a separate Technology Transfer Promotion Office, to be merged into one unit. In fact, since its creation...
IMAQ has expanded its functions and diversified in its role as the point of contact at Kyushu University for facilitating university-industry-government (U-I-G) collaborations and intellectual property strategies. The center supports activities ranging from joint research projects to national projects, technology transfer, business design, start-up venture projects, and promoting international collaboration.

These activities are coordinated by seven Groups which operate under the umbrella of IMAQ and together manage all aspects of cooperation between businesses, governments and the university. Regular committee meetings are held by Group leaders to devise plans and strategies, and to evaluate the market value of intellectual property resulting from university research. The Groups are as follows:

- A Coordinate Group monitors and defines opportunities for university-industry-government collaboration based on suggestions from private companies and academic staff, then helps to coordinate a response to those needs.
- A Planning Group ensures that university-industry collaborations are aligned with Kyushu University’s overall mission and general strategies.
- A Liaison Group plans and coordinates university-industry-government collaboration to address technical issues and the needs of private companies.
- A Technology Transfer Group works to support the broader utilization and diffusion of intellectual property.
- A Start-up Support Group assists new business ventures that originate at the university through the use of university resources.
- A Projects Support Group supports management and coordination of national projects.
- A Design Group promotes the acquisition of design rights by utilizing the design expertise in the university’s unique Graduate School of Design.
- A University-Industry International Collaboration Center (UNIC) supports the overseas development of large-scale research projects (originating within both the university and external bodies), overseas marketing of university research seeds and the promotion of various organizations’ international cooperation.
- A General Affairs Group offers support as the administrative center of IMAQ.

The new Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation is expected to enable enhancements to the range of services and experiences offered, and also to facilitate more synergy among various activities. The volume of activity supported by the Technology Transfer Group, for example, has grown to include the evaluation of close to 300 inventions a year, including efforts to help the founders of some to acquire patents, and support to faculty seeking to establish start-up companies and then license new technologies to them.
The new Center is also intended to address some of the shortcomings that became evident to the school through its early stage activities. According to Takata, one of these is a need to more clearly define the pathways from research to market. He says that Japanese higher education institutions offer few courses on creation, and that there is a generally low level of an entrepreneurial mindset among Japanese students. He believes the school has an opportunity to create an “ignition” to foster the process of innovation, and believes there is a complementary need for more courses on how to bring new creations to market. While in the past QBS courses have been limited to only business school students, plans for the Center include the delivery of courses to individuals from across the university on topics such as how to create a business plan for bringing a new technology to market, with special emphasis on technologies emerging from the university.

A related second opportunity involves further integrating the innovation-related courses and activities within the business school with other parts of the university. While the QBS faculty is small – with about 20 full-time faculty members – the university itself is large and has particularly strong science, engineering, and medical schools with knowledgeable faculty and talented students. Takata hopes the Center will drive opportunities for multi-disciplinary teams.

A third, important opportunity has to do with the Japanese corporate culture, which has been slow to embrace open innovation. He hopes that efforts to develop more human resources with technology commercialization capabilities will help to create a shift in this mindset, resulting in companies being more willing to look outside their own organizations for new technologies and processes. Takata anticipates that securing the capital to support start-ups that emerge from these efforts may be challenging in Japan, which does not have a strong venture capital industry, but he said the school is exploring opportunities to partner with schools in other countries that have stronger networks of VC firms.

That last consideration is one that he finds particularly intriguing in today’s global environment and in the midst of a growing emphasis by business schools on establishing international partnerships. “It’s important to not limit our thinking only to Japan,” Takata notes. “Innovation doesn’t have a border.”

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End Notes