Proposal for a New Exchange Program

After having run an earlier version of this program for three years, we would now like to propose a revised and improved program that may further benefit the students of both Princeton and the University of Tokyo. While the program has been extremely successful during the past three years, we feel that it may be time to build on this foundation to develop a more focused program that can enhance friendship and academic exchange between the two universities.

The revised program will be designed with a focus on the city of Rikuzentakata, one of the cities in northeast Japan that was severely damaged by the 2011 Tsunami. As in the past, each Princeton student will ideally work on their individual research (junior paper and senior thesis for PU students), which may not necessarily be directly related to Rikuzentakata or the 2011 disaster, but under the theme of disaster response, recovery, and memory construction. In addition to their individual research, students will be enrolled in a course offered by Prof. Jin Sato at the U of Tokyo, and will be assigned group projects based on their understanding and analysis of issues faced by Rikuzentakata. The program will consist of a one-week visit to Rikuzentakata and a presentation of student proposals of solutions to the problems to the municipality officials (a format similar to the “Junior Task Force” offered at the Woodrow Wilson School, in which PI Jin Sato has been an instructor). The program aims to bring the students of both Princeton and U of Tokyo to be fully engaged in course work, field work, and group projects in Tokyo and in Rikuzentakata.

In early September, participating U of Tokyo students will have an opportunity to visit Princeton for a reflection workshop. This workshop will not only include presentation of their findings in Rikuzentakata to the Princeton community but also to visit the 9.11 Memorial and other relevant sites to compare how Japan and the U.S. respond to and commemorate disasters.
In the past years, each Princeton student worked on his or her own individual research for a junior paper/senior thesis in Tokyo while taking classes, attending seminars, and participating in field trips. The variety of their research topics, ranging from politics to literature and biology, contributed to the diversity of the program; however, there was a lack of common platform on which the students could share their findings and interests. Students have also been asking for more academic engagement with the UT students. This new structure aims to integrate students’ individual research, which tend to span over a diverse range of topics, and bring the PU and UT students together to work on group projects under a common theme. This structure is also designed to complement existing exchange programs between the two Universities, noting that University of Tokyo students have availed themselves of long-term visits to Princeton more than their Princeton counterparts have in Tokyo. Our program is thus designed to draw from the expertise at UT as well as the research and classroom opportunities in Japan in a way that benefits Princeton students unable to pursue a full semester or year of study there while also ensuring that UT students, many of whom have focused on disaster response and management, can interact with and build on the knowledge and course activities of their Princeton counterparts.