

Japanese Studies at Palacky University

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Palacky University

Palacky University in Olomouc, founded in 1573, is the second oldest university in the Czech Republic. At present, the University has seven faculties: Theology, Medicine, Philosophical, Science, Pedagogical, Physical Culture, and Law. It has over 900 teaching staff and about 12,000 students.

History

Japanese studies were established at the Philosophical Faculty in 1992, and the first students were accepted in 1993. In 2001, the Department of Asian Studies was established, consisting presently of Chinese and Japanese Studies, in the future to be joined by Korean.

Facilities

The facilities include a Japanese library of approximately 5000 titles, audio-visual labs and a small computer center. The library includes books and teaching materials donated by the Japan Foundation and by Mr. Tanaka Yoshiki, the contemporary Japanese writer.

Staff

At present, the Japanese section has three full-time teachers, two Japanese and one Czech, and several external teachers. General philology courses and some other general courses are provided by professors from larger departments.

In order to provide a greater variety of specialized courses, a system of short-period, intensive language and literature-oriented courses has been established, taught by visiting professors from Utsunomiya University. In terms of teaching hours, each course is equivalent to a standard one-semester course.

Students

Until 2005, students were accepted every second year. Therefore, since 1993 there have been only six classes in total. The number of current students has in the past few

years fluctuated between 50 and 70, depending on whether there were 1st, 3rd and 5th-year students or 2nd and 4th-year students that particular year.

Degrees offered

There is currently a three-year BA programme and a two-year MA programme in Japanese Philology, which, in compliance with new legislation, replaced the previous five-year Master's degree. The Philosophical Faculty has a double-major system, so Japanese can only be studied in combination with another major. In the first several years Japanese could only be studied in combination with English, but presently it can be combined with any major within the Philosophical Faculty or even with a major from some other faculty. Most of the present students have still chosen English, but some have another language, such as German, Spanish or Dutch, or sociology, philosophy or even film science. Future plans include establishing a Japanese-Applied Economics programme as there is a great demand for such graduates.

The aim of the BA programme is for the students to learn practical language, both spoken and written, sufficient to reach Level 2 of the Japanese Proficiency Test. The BA graduates should have a sufficient grasp of the language to continue further developing on their own, and a reasonable understanding of Japan in general, so that after completing the programme they can pursue a career utilizing Japanese.

The MA course is aimed at further developing the students' knowledge and skills, providing more specialized courses expected of a philology major, and providing the students with optional courses suitable to their interests.

Study abroad

An increasing number of students get a chance to study Japanese in Japan or some other country. The best students succeed in winning a Monbukagakusho scholarship. There are also two exchange programmes with Japanese universities: Gakushuuin Joshi Daigaku in Tokyo (approximately 3 students a year) and Utsunomiya Daigaku (1 or 2 students per year). Almost every year there is a student who receives a one-year scholarship to study Japanese in the USA. Some students spend a semester at an EU university through the Socrates programme.

Future plans

In the 12 years since the establishment of Japanese studies, we have finally managed to create a reasonable environment for our programme. To improve the quality and variety of the courses offered, there needs to be a critical mass of students to warrant a budget sufficient to staff all teaching needs. Thus, one of the main future

goals is to increase the number of students and expand the department. There is currently a great demand for Japanese interpreters in this country, so it is extremely difficult to find people interested in pursuing an academic career. With the increasing number of graduates, however, this problem should be solved in the near future.

Starting with this year, students will be accepted every year, which should help solve organizational problems. With the old system, each course was taught every other year, so students who spent any time abroad could not then take the required classes. With annual classes, students will be able to more easily take part in exchange programmes.

We have started some co-operation and exchange programmes with other schools and are very much interested in establishing more.

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