

University Accreditation Results
(Results for Certified Evaluation and Accreditation for university)

Kumamoto Gakuen University



Basic Information of the Institution	
Ownership: Private	Location: Kumamoto, Japan
Accreditation Status	
Year of the Review: 2015	
Accreditation Status: Accredited	(Accreditation Period: April.01.2016 – March.31.2023)

Certified Evaluation and Accreditation Results for Kumamoto Gakuen University

Overview

Kumamoto Gakuen University (hereafter, the University) originated from a private foreign exchange institute, the Kumamoto Overseas Association, that was established in 1918. In 1942, it became the Institute of Oriental Languages. Thereafter, the new departments, faculties, and graduate schools were established through reorganization, and the institution became Kumamoto Gakuen University in 1994. The University has five faculties, four graduate schools and one professional graduate school in Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture. Its mission has been to foster persons of talent with intelligence and highly developed applied skills and knowledge and to contribute to developing cultures throughout the world with the founding spirit of “Mutual Friendship between Teachers and Students,” “Deep Respect for Freedom and Liberty,” and “Warm Heart of One School as One Family.” The University is engaged in education and research activities that foster persons contributing to society and the local community.

After its accreditation review by Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) in 2008, the University established and reorganized the Graduate School of Accountancy and the Department of Life Wellness in the Faculty of Social Welfare in order to develop an education and research organization that meets the needs of the changing age and society. JUAA has acknowledged in this accreditation effort that the Open Research Center for Minamata Studies in the University has earned worldwide recognition as a research institute that earnestly tackles local issues. It is noteworthy that the University not only offers a unique curriculum that helps students learn from and contribute to society, but also that it was developed by each of the faculties and graduate schools, and attempts to generalize multiple efforts to deal with social issues in the local community.

While these respectable practices have been observed, several issues need to be addressed. For example, the education content, the implementation of a course-based degree-granting system, and the admission of students in the doctoral programs in the graduate school all require attention. Another major challenge is that the University has not regularly conducted self-study of the University as a whole, resulting in insufficiency in internal quality assurance. In an effort to make self-study effective, the entire University is expected to develop a mechanism for changing itself effectively and to demonstrate the quality of the educational and research activities to society.

Prior to this accreditation review, the Graduate School of Accountancy had already undergone professional graduate school accreditation review for by the International Accounting Education Association in 2013. Thus, JUAA reviewed the School this time by examining the improvements from 2013 onward from the standpoint of University Accreditation (institutional certified evaluation and accreditation).

Notable Strengths

Education and Research Organization

- It is commendable that the Open Research Center for Minamata Studies has been regarded as one of the most distinctive research bodies of the University. The Center has continuously made and consolidated a variety of efforts, from both international and local perspectives, and plays an important role in society. These efforts include developing the framework that involves the local community in research, dispatching and expanding the outcomes of Minamata studies domestically and internationally, and training young researchers. Moreover, the Center has reflected the knowledge in education of the University.

Educational Content, Methods, and Outcome

- It is commendable that the educational content of various courses signifies a unique attempt to learn from and contribute to the local community. For example, the Faculty of Social Welfare offers the Minamata Studies program, which deals with the environmental problems in the local community and provides an opportunity to learn about Minamata disease from many different perspectives beyond the arena of the victims and researchers. The program for training leaders in the local communities aims at mitigating disaster and administered with the collaboration of three other universities in Kumamoto Prefecture. The program provides opportunities from public policy and other perspectives (for example, through a lecture on social work to mitigate disaster) and offers a workshop on social work to mitigate disaster that provides an opportunity to support people and research in affected communities. The Social Welfare and Environment master's program in the Graduate School of Social Welfare offers subjects, such as Fieldwork in Social Work and Environment and Studies in Methodology for Social Research, that are both coordinated with research in the Center for Minamata Studies in order to utilize the center's expertise.

Suggestions for Improvement

Educational Content, Methods, and Outcome

- The policies on degree award of all graduate schools state only the requirements for course completion and the process for completing degrees but do not refer to the knowledge and abilities required for the degree completion. This should be improved.
- The doctoral programs in management in the Graduate School of Commerce and social welfare in the Graduate School of Social Welfare do not appropriately combine research work and course work. Considering the purpose of the credit-based degree-granting system, the doctoral program should offer appropriate educational content.
- For students in the fourth year and after in the Faculty of Commerce, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Foreign Studies, the first and second divisions in the Faculty of Social Welfare (except the Department of Life Wellness), and first-division students in the Department of Life Wellness, the maximum limit of credits they are allowed to register for in a year is high at 50. This should be improved, considering the purpose of a credit-based system.
- In the master's program in the Graduate School of Commerce, the criteria for examining a report of research results (research paper) on a specific topic are not clearly stated. These criteria should be stated clearly in the graduate student handbook and communicated to students in advance.
- In the doctoral programs in the graduate schools, some students complete all the requirements except the dissertation, and leave the university before completing the dissertation requirement within the time limit by the University. Later, when these students submit their dissertations, even though they do not have enrollment status, they are granted doctoral degrees in the same manner as those students continuously enrolled. This is an inappropriate use of the system that should be corrected. In accordance with the purpose of having doctoral programs, the University should create measures to enhance the degree completion within the required time frame.

Enrollment

- The average of the ratios of the last five years of enrolled freshmen to the freshman admission cap and the ratio of enrolled students to the student enrollment cap are low at 0.87 and 0.80 respectively in the first division in the Department of Social Environment and Welfare in the Faculty of Social Welfare, and at 0.48 and 0.51 respectively in the second division in the Department of Social Welfare in the Faculty of Social Welfare. The ratio of enrolled students to the student enrollment cap is low at 0.88 in the Department of Commerce of the Faculty of Commerce, and at 0.25 in master's program in the Graduate School of Area-based Cultural Studies. Conversely, the average of the ratios of the last five years of enrolled freshmen to the freshman admission cap is high at 1.26 in the first division in the Department of Life Wellness in the Faculty of Social Welfare, and the ratio of enrolled students to the student enrollment cap is high at 2.56 in the doctoral program in the Graduate School of Social Welfare. These numbers should be improved.

Administration and Finance

- In an effort to establish sound financial conditions, the University developed a three-year plan to restore fiscal health in 2013. However, the content of the plan is not sufficiently or organically related to the later report on the effort to vitalize education within the University. These plans should be reviewed to ensure the sufficient implementation of research into education while securing financial resources.

Internal Quality Assurance

- Self-study has been conducted since the last accreditation, but the central focus has been coping with the issues pointed out in the previous accreditation, and they have not regularly been carried out across the entire university. Self-study conducted in each section should be coordinated with evaluation across the entire university according to the Regulation on Self-Study, developed in 2014.