

Supplementary Review Results

Hirosaki Gakuin University



Basic Information of the Institution	
Ownership: Private	Location: Aomori, Japan
Accreditation Status	
Year of the Review: 2019	
Accreditation Status: Accredited (Accreditation Period: April 1.2020 – March 31.2025)	

Supplementary Review Results for Hirosaki Gakuin University

Overview

As a result of the University Accreditation of Hirosaki Gakuin University (hereinafter referred to as the “University”) conducted by the Japan University Accreditation Association in AY2017, serious issues requiring addressing were raised in regard to the three areas of faculty members and faculty, student enrollment, and management and finance, and, due to the severity of the issues, it was determined that the University did not meet the University Standards of the Japan University Accreditation Association. In addition to the above, seven other suggestions for improvement were made.

In response to these suggestions, the University has established the Risk Management Committee, chaired by the president, and engaged in improvement in cooperation with the committees responsible for the respective areas. As for the three areas of serious concern mentioned above that resulted in the determination of non-conformity to the University Standards, the Risk Management Committee considers the area of faculty members and faculty, and measures of improvement in the areas of student enrollment and finance are developed and implemented by the New Strategy Meeting, which had already been in charge of student recruitment activities prior to the university accreditation, and the Management Improvement Implementation Meeting, which was established in AY2018 for the purpose of promoting financial improvement. The present Supplementary Review involved conducting an assessment in line with the University Standards effective as of the time of conducting the previous University Accreditation. As a result, although some areas have not yet been sufficiently improved, it was determined, based on a comprehensive judgment of the progress of improvement regarding the three areas of serious concern requiring improvement, that the University satisfies the University Standards.

First, regarding faculty members and faculty, the University implemented personnel-related measures, such as qualification examinations for graduate school supervisors, in line with the Hirosaki Gakuin University Ideal Faculty Member Profile and Faculty Organization Policy and in accordance with the hiring and promotion regulations in the relevant schools and graduate schools, in order to address the fact that the University as a whole was short of five full-time faculty members, including two professors, relative to the number required under the Standards for Establishment of Universities, the Department of Japanese Literature (Master’s Program) in the Graduate

School of Liberal Arts was short of one research supervisor relative to the number required under the Standards for Establishment of Graduate Schools, and the Department of Human and Social Welfare (Master's Program) in the Graduate School of Social Welfare was short of two research supervisors relative to the number required under the Standards for Establishment of Graduate Schools. As of May 1, 2018, the University as a whole had the required number of full-time faculty members. However, the Department of Japanese Literature (Master's Program) in the Graduate School of Liberal Arts was still short of one research supervisor, and the Department of Human and Social Welfare (Master's Program) in the Graduate School of Social Welfare was still short of two research supervisors. Subsequently, as a result of qualification examinations conducted by the Graduate School Committee based on faculty members' research and educational achievements, one professor at the Japanese / Japanese Literature Department in the School of Liberal Arts, and two professors at the Social Welfare Department in the School of Social Welfare were assigned to the respective graduate schools as full-time faculty members. Thus, as of May 1, 2019, the University had the required number of full-time faculty members as provided in the Standards for Establishment of Universities and the Standards for Establishment of Graduate Schools. With regard to the issues concerning faculty members and faculty that required addressing, the University has improved the situation by hiring and promoting personnel in accordance with the Hirosaki Gakuin University Regulations for Faculty Member Hiring and Promotion, among other regulations. However, the University should not only address the shortage in the number of faculty members, but should also make improvements in the three areas listed below in order to organize a sustainable faculty structure in an appropriate manner going forward.

(i) The number of full-time faculty members hired in accordance with the Hirosaki Gakuin University and Graduate School Regulations (Bylaws) on the Hiring Process of Special Pay Faculty Members (Contract Faculty Members) has increased. Their term of employment is one year, but it is stated that "Age restrictions pursuant to the Retirement Regulations and the like shall not apply," thereby rendering the Retirement Regulations ineffective. In view of this issue and other inadequacies observed in human resources-related regulations, the University should establish such regulations appropriately in consideration of the hiring conditions of full-time faculty members.

(ii) In AY2018, the Risk Management Committee formulated a two-year human resources plan, the Faculty Member Hiring Plan Taking Into Account Faculty Member Age Distribution, but four of the seven faculty members hired in AY2018 were above retirement age, and the unbalance in faculty age distribution has not yet been improved. Therefore, going forward, the University should give due consideration to age distribution when hiring faculty members.

(iii) The Risk Management Committee has been responsible for increasing the number of faculty members, but the committee cannot be considered an organization capable of examining human resources-related matters on a permanent basis. Therefore, the University should create a system whereby faculty appropriateness is regularly reviewed and assessed and improvements are made based on the review/assessment results.

In view of the fact that as of AY2017, the average of ratios of freshman enrollment to the freshman enrollment cap and the ratios of student enrollment to the student enrollment cap in the preceding five years had been at a low level in the University as a whole, the School of Liberal Arts, the English/ English Literature Department and Japanese / Japanese Literature Department in the School of Liberal Arts, and the School of Social Welfare, the University formulated the Mid- to Long-term Target Action Plan to improve the enrollment situation, and implemented many measures within a short period of time, such as enhancing connectivity between high schools, including those affiliated to the University, and the University, improving open campus events, visiting high schools more frequently, establishing new scholarship programs, modifying the entrance examination system, and reducing the enrollment quota for the School of Social Welfare. As a result, the enrollment number increased on a university-wide basis in AY2018, and the AY2019 numbers are also showing a positive trend toward improvement. With the exception of the ratio of student enrollment to the student enrollment cap in the Japanese / Japanese Literature Department in the School of Liberal Arts, however, the average of ratios of freshman enrollment to the freshman enrollment cap and the ratios of student enrollment to the student enrollment cap in the last five years in almost all of the schools and departments which were mentioned previously, as well as in the University as a whole, are still low, even though the numbers have improved as compared to when the previous University Accreditation was conducted. Therefore, the University should make further improvements toward ensuring that quotas are met.

As for management and finance, the University had not formulated a mid- to long-term financial plan despite the fact that the ratio of the excessive amount of carried over expenditures for the next year to the income from business operations (attributable income) was extremely high and the ratio of the financial assets to the required reserve fund was extremely low. Taking the results of the previous University Accreditation seriously, the University formulated the Hirosaki Gakuin Management Improvement Plan for AY2018 to AY2022 (Five-year Plan) in AY2018. The plan clearly expresses the need for educational reform in line with the University's founding principles, including review of the quota for the School of Social Welfare and implementation of curriculum reform in order to conduct general education that focuses on the development of communication

skills, and also presents a clear financial plan for achieving a healthy financial situation through cutting labor costs and paying down debt. The University set a financial target to “Achieve an operating margin of 5% or more in the final year under the Management Improvement Plan,” and has conducted a simulation involving statements of income and expenditures, statements of operating income and expenditures, and balance sheets for the period from AY2019 to AY2022. In relation to this financial plan, the University has implemented measures for improvement in order to gain external funding, such as holding briefings and workshops on Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research application. However, no concrete measures have been established regarding the labor cost reduction plan. Moreover, the operating margin for the final year in the simulation is expected to be unattainable as a financial target.

Regarding the financial situation, the corporation as a whole as well as the university division have maintained a positive net income, and thus a certain level of improvement has been achieved as compared to when the previous University Accreditation was conducted. However, partly due to the fact that only one year has passed since the formulation of the financial plan, the ratio of the excessive amount of carried over expenditures for the next year to the income from business operations (attributable income) is still extremely high, and the ratio of the financial assets to the required reserve fund is still extremely low. Therefore, the University should strive to improve its financial situation from a mid- to long-term perspective in order to establish the financial base necessary to conduct educational and research activities in a stable manner. Going forward, the University should further clarify the details of current measures and the targets to be achieved in order to use the Management Improvement Plan as an effective roadmap for financial improvement. The University should consistently engage in the measures currently under planning.

Next, the University has made many improvements in regard to the seven suggestions for improvement made previously. However, further improvement is desired for the areas below, as satisfactory results have not necessarily been achieved.

As for educational programs, methods, and outcomes, the University has limited the number of credits students can register for in a single year to 48 credits in both the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Social Welfare, in response to the fact that the limit had been too high. However, since the limit does not apply to certification-related subjects, the University should ensure that the newly imposed limit does not become a mere formality. Regarding the fact that organizational workshops and research for improving educational programs and methods have not been conducted in the graduate schools, the University has stated the intention to arrange exchange meetings between

graduate students and supervisors and enable students to participate in academic conferences and on-site training programs, and thereby enhance research supervision by promoting exchange with students. However, these activities do not extend beyond the scope of regular research supervision, and thus the graduate schools should engage in the development of more sophisticated organizational workshops and research in order to improve their educational programs and methods.

With regard to the fact that the ratio of student enrollment to the student enrollment cap was low in the Graduate Schools of Liberal Arts and Social Welfare, the ratio is still low in both graduate schools as of May 1, 2019. Therefore, the University should make improvements to meet the quotas for its graduate program.

Regarding educational and research environment, it was shown in the previous University Accreditation that the University had not established regulations for dealing with cases of research fraud. In relation to this, the University reported that although the Hirosaki Gakuin University Regulations and Bylaws for Fraudulent Research Activity and the Hirosaki Gakuin University Guidelines for the Preservation of Research Material, etc. had been established and disseminated to members of faculty and staff, they were not aware of the regulations and guidelines and that there had been a shortcoming in the submitted documents. The fact that the University was not aware of the existence of regulations and other important internal documents is a clear indication of the lack of awareness regarding research fraud, as well as of the presence of governance-related problems. Going forward, the University plans to create a manual for research supervision in the graduate program. Research fraud is an issue that may lead to the loss of public trust in the University, and thus requires a university-wide response.

As described above, the University has swiftly implemented measures for improvement in response to the results of the AY2017 University Accreditation, although some areas still need improvement. It is worth noting that the issues of serious concern had already been raised in the University Accreditation before the previous one, meaning that the University did not implement the appropriate measures on a university-wide level until receiving the results of the previous University Accreditation. Going forward, we hope the University seriously takes the fact that there remain areas requiring further improvement, continues engaging in addressing the issues, and develops its program ever more in order to enhance educational quality.

Suggestions for Improvement

Educational Program, Methods, and Outcome

- The activities for improvement of educational programs and methods conducted in the Graduate Schools of Liberal Arts and Social Welfare do not extend beyond the scope of regular research supervision, and organizational workshops and research for faculty members are still not being conducted in order to improve educational programs and methods. This should be improved.

Student Enrollment

- The ratio of student enrollment to the student enrollment cap was low in the graduate schools (Master's Programs) in AY2019, at 0.10 in the Graduate School of Liberal Arts and 0.20 in the Graduate School of Social Welfare. Therefore, the University should significantly improve graduate school quota management.

Management and Finance

- The University formulated the Hirosaki Gakuin Management Improvement Plan for AY2018 to AY2022 (Five-year Plan) in response to the results of the previous University Accreditation. However, the University has not established concrete measures or targets pertaining to cutting labor costs, among other areas, and the financial target for the final year in the simulation is expected to be unattainable. Although the corporation as a whole as well as the university division have maintained a positive net income, the ratio of the excessive amount of carried over expenditures for next year to the income from business operations (attributable income) is still high, and the ratio of the financial assets to the required reserve fund is still low. Therefore, the University should review the plan and establish the financial base necessary to conduct educational and research activities in a stable manner.

Recommendations

Student Enrollment

- In AY2019, the average of ratios of freshman enrollment to the freshman enrollment cap in the preceding five years was still low at 0.75 in the University as a whole, 0.68 in the School of Liberal Arts, 0.50 in the English / English Literature Department in the School of Liberal Arts, 0.86 in the Japanese / Japanese Literature Department in

the School of Liberal Arts, and 0.70 in the School of Social Welfare. The ratio of student enrollment to the student enrollment cap has also been low at 0.76 in the University as a whole, 0.71 in the School of Liberal Arts, 0.53 in the English / English Literature Department in the School of Liberal Arts, and 0.68 in the School of Social Welfare. Therefore, the University should significantly improve quota management for its undergraduate program.