Chapter 2
Higher Education Policy and the Academic Profession

Yoshimasa Kano

2.1 Introduction

The most important roles expected of university professors are education and research. However, as part of the transformation of universities over the last 20 years, they have also been asked to develop identities as teachers. This change is motivated by a number of factors, including the fact that university professors in Japan have traditionally identified themselves primarily as researchers rather than teachers and that, in the global knowledge-based society, there is increasing demand on universities to demonstrate clear learning outcomes. In addition, in the era of universal access to higher education, there is increasing pressure on universities to maintain and improve the level of education. In this chapter, I track university policy reports regarding professorship since the establishment of the Ad Hoc Council on Education, and particularly during the roughly two-decade period following establishment of the University Council of 1987, in order to assess how policies have been codified in university regulations and how these policies have changed actual practices at universities.

Y. Kano (*)
Faculty of Education, Kagawa University, Kagawa, Japan
e-mail: kanotti@ed.kagawa-u.ac.jp
2.2 Progress of the “Educational Revolution”

2.2.1 Higher Education Policy and Reports Issued by the University Council

In the past, the decision-making power of universities was held primarily by the centralized bureaucracy of the Ministry of Education and, within universities, by departments, disciplines, and programs of study. The authority of university federations and individual universities, by contrast, was relatively weak. To change this state of affairs, national universities were transformed into independent corporate entities, giving more authority to university presidents with the goal of revitalizing educational and research activities under their leadership. However, it is necessary to maintain some degree of centralized management to coordinate the roles of individual universities so that there is a coherent system of national universities and, thus, the role of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as the policy-making agency has not been reduced. On the contrary, it is possible that, in this day and age where the ability to compete in ever-intensifying global competition is based on “knowledge,” government control of higher education is increasing. In order to understand the “transformation of professorship,” it is necessary to first understand the trajectory of university policy and, as such, it is impossible to ignore the context of university policy at the national level.

Of course, higher education policy does not only entail deliberations or reports issued by the University Council or its successor, the Subcommittee on Universities of the Central Council for Education. One such example would be a directive issued by the Office of the Prime Minister, which, needless to say, lies outside the framework of MEXT. In 2001, the then Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, proposed a series of bold structural reforms of universities, including (1) restructuring and consolidation of national universities, (2) conferring corporate status on universities, and (3) establishing centers of excellence (COE) as foci for advanced studies. This was called the Toyama Plan, named after the then minister of MEXT. The Education Rebuilding Council was established between 2006 and 2008 under Shinzo Abe, who succeeded Koizumi as Prime Minister. As illustrated by this example, education policy has, on occasion, been influenced by the office of the Prime Minister, but the impact of such outside influence has been limited. Due to Japan’s vertical governing structure, formulation of education policy is primarily the responsibility of MEXT. Policy is implemented by a sequence of steps including inquiry and reporting by the University Council and the Central Council for Education. I felt that ‘subject to’ could be removed since the steps relate to policy implementation, and policy wouldn’t be implemented unless the bills were approved. Thus, examining policy reports issued by the University Council or the Subcommittee on Universities of the Central Council for Education, and particularly their implications for the roles of university professors, is indispensable to understanding the transformation of professorship.
2.2.2 Legacy of the Ad Hoc Council on Education (1984–1987)

Before examining policy reports issued by the University Council, it is necessary for us to first examine the Ad Hoc Council on Education, established in 1984 under the administration of Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. The Prime Minister’s council was strongly influenced by the ideologies of neo-liberalism and market-based principles advocated by Ronald Reagan, the then President of the United States, and Margaret Thatcher, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. These ideologies, which at the time were new, encouraged a shift from a “planned” higher education policy to more “liberalized” policies that remain the basis for today’s policies.

Reform of higher education was discussed over a period of approximately 3 years by the Fourth Subcommittee of the Ad Hoc Council on Education. The result was a proposal, communicated in the Council’s second policy report issued in 1986, calling for establishment of a “permanent university council,” tasked with deliberating the basic course of Japan’s higher education policy, offering necessary advice and support to universities, and having the right to make recommendations to the Minister of Education. The proposal was carried over to the fourth and final policy report, and the University Council was formally inaugurated in September 1987, a month after publication of the Ad Hoc Council’s final report. The establishment of the first independent body with the exclusive task of investigating and examining issues related to universities and higher education served as a significant driving force to advance the reformation of higher education. The University Council issued numerous policy reports that eventually had considerable impact on universities and institutions of higher education and played a significant role in establishing the direction of subsequent reform of higher education in Japan. In 2001, the University Council was merged with the Central Council for Education as part of a reorganization of government ministries, arriving at its current incarnation as the Subcommittee on Universities within the Central Council for Education.

The Ad Hoc Council on Education policy reports called for individualization, diversification, and advancement of higher education, increased linkage of universities with society, opening up of universities, aggressive promotion of academic research, establishment of independent and autonomous organization and management, improvement of teacher quality, and development of economic infrastructure as a precondition for supporting liberalization policies. Relevant to the topic of this chapter, these reports comment on the background, work conditions, and professional development of university professors, as illustrated in the fourth policy report of the Ad Hoc Council on Education issued in 1978:

1. To widely and flexibly recruit even company employees as teachers regardless of nationality;
2. To open up the decision-making process on personnel affairs and pave the way for introduction of a tenure system for professors in order to encourage personnel flexibility and to examine their treatment and research conditions;
3. To promote proactive measures for nurturing current and future researchers, and to examine job descriptions, treatment, and job titles of assistants;
4. To request universities to commit themselves to evaluating educational and research achievements, and to encourage teachers to develop themselves through friendly competition;
5. To reorganize and improve efficiency of administrative structures, and systematically promote professional training for university professors and staff in order to improve quality of education and research.

In this section, we do not address the fifth item (administrative staff development) above, as it is not directly related to professorship, although there has been practical effort since the end of the 1990s to promote staff development and even establishment of academic societies by university administrative staff. What is important is that, for the first time, attention had been paid to the multiple dimensions of university professorship, a subject that had previously been ignored in university policy. Policy reports make recommendations regarding the qualifications, tenure, and evaluation of professors. Discussion of these issues was taken over by the University Council, leading to the issuance of reports and changes in codified policy.

Of course, professors have always been subject to a variety of opinions, especially critical ones. They often faced strong criticism from students during the era of student movements in the 1960s and their attitude toward research and education has been fiercely criticized, primarily by journalists. However, very few policies have been directed at professors. Up to this point, higher education policy dealt solely with issues of system and scale and little reference was made to the role of professors who stood at the forefront of university education. Professorship had been treated as sacred ground, protected from public scrutiny in the name of university autonomy.

### 2.2.3 Policy Report University Education (1991)

The first policy report issued by the University Council in 1988 was entitled *Flexibility in Graduate School Programs*. The report calls for, with respect to graduate school faculty, “recruiting individuals from the society at large who are confirmed to have outstanding knowledge or experience in a major field of study and a high level of ability in terms of education and research and providing them with teaching certification.” It was believed that experience of actual research, development, and practice in leading-edge fields of science and technology, and international economic activities, would revitalize education and research in graduate schools.

Two and a half years after publication of the first policy report, 1991 saw the issuance of a significant report entitled *On University Education*. Specifically, the document outlined a roadmap for universities and called for: (1) design of distinctive curricula as well as flexible and well-developed educational systems,
(2) improvement in the learning environment for students, (3) improvement in liberal arts and professional education, and (4) offering of diverse learning opportunities. Most importantly, the Outline of Standards of University Establishment removed the framework separating liberal arts from professional education. As a result, university reform progressed, leaving it, as much as possible, to each university to design its own curriculum based on its principles and objectives. The rush to create new curricula by each university led to unprecedented enthusiasm in discussions regarding university education, focusing particularly on what kind of curriculum should be created and on both pedagogical and practical aspects of incorporating a liberal arts curriculum. In addition, in exchange for the increased freedom, i.e. deregulation, it was understood that universities were obliged to incorporate a system for continual self-evaluation in their respective standards of practice.


The report A Vision for Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures: To Be Distinctive Universities in a Competitive Environment (hereafter, Policy Report for the 21st Century), issued in 1998 by the University Council, was comparable in its influence to the University Education report issued in 1991. As is evident from the title, the aim of this policy report was to outline a grand design for higher education in Japan. The report proposed four principles for reform: (1) nurturing an ability to tackle challenges, (2) making education and research systems more flexible, (3) promoting responsible decision-making and implementation, and (4) establishing a multi-faceted evaluation system. With regard to professorship, the report emphasized the role of professors as teachers. University education, at the time, was unable to deal with the universalization of higher education and the increased student diversity. The majority of professors were unable to respond to the new paradigm and were perceived to be overly focused on research and insufficiently cognizant of their responsibilities as educators.

The following quotation from the report is illustrative of this perception of professors:

Although it is important for universities to institutionally reform curricula as well as handling of courses and credit structure, it is even more important for professors themselves to become more aware of their responsibility as teachers and to make continuous efforts to improve their teaching skills and to conduct classes that stimulate students’ willingness to learn.

However, well-established customs and thinking cannot change overnight simply because of government policy. There is a tendency among academicians to place emphasis on research, not only because the majority of professors in Japan are accustomed to do so, but because research is often the primary criterion for evaluation and is related to the acquisition of external funding for scientific research. Subsequent policy reports have continued to emphasize the “educational responsibility” of professors and their “evaluation as educators” as pillars of an
education-focused policy. The language of the reports emphasize the insufficiency of reforms, often using wording such as, “while the recommendations made several years ago have begun to show results of changes thanks to the efforts of each university, the current level of reform is insufficient. In order to improve, …”; additional requirements or measures are introduced with the phrase, “in order to keep reforms moving forward, it is necessary to …” In this manner, recommendations were transformed into requirements as they became codified in university regulations and systems, strongly directing the behavior of university professors and administrative staff.

Then, what kinds of systems have been introduced to reform university education? If syllabi, term systems, office hours, grade point average (GPA) and teaching assistant (TA) are considered “small instruments” of university education, mandatory faculty development (FD), teacher evaluation, change in requirements for teacher certification, and the establishment of professional graduate schools are “larger instruments” of educational reform. Next, we would like to investigate the transformation of professorship from the standpoint of these “large instruments.”

2.3 Large Instruments of “Educational Reform”

2.3.1 Mandatory Faculty Development (FD)

Around the time of the initial University Council discussions, the acronym FD was so little-known that it was mistaken by some as an abbreviation for floppy disk. In policy reports from the University Council, FD is defined as “institutional efforts to improve the content and teaching methods of teachers; specific examples include mutual observation of classes by teachers, seminars on teaching methods, orientation for new teachers.” As is clear from this definition, FD primarily targets improving the teaching ability of professors.

The concept of FD was imported to Japan from the US during the 1980s. While the General Education Society began to hold symposia on this concept in the mid-1980s, and while FD drew some interest from a few researchers and groups such as the Academic Society, it was rarely addressed by universities (Arimoto 2005, p. 191). In this respect, its inclusion in the Policy Report for the 21st Century led to the rapid spread of FD to universities around Japan. The report states that “it is necessary for each university to define in its standards for establishment a systematic means to implement faculty development with respect to principles, objectives, class content and teaching methods at the university or department level in order to improve the content and teaching ability of individual faculty members.” The result was the incorporation of policies requiring universities to make an effort to implement FD into university standards.

FD as non-binding university policy was further emphasized in a policy report entitled Higher Education in the Age of Globalization issued by the Central Council for Education in 2000, which stated that “it is necessary to promote the
implementation of faculty development that was newly institutionalized at each university in the previous fiscal year for improving teaching skills of teachers,” and “it is important to evaluate both the institutional educational activities of the university as well as the educational activities of individual teachers. In doing so, it is necessary to appropriately evaluate efforts to improve educational activities at both the institutional and individual levels from a variety of perspectives and to ensure that these evaluations are reflected in improved educational quality through modification of FD and rewarding and better treatment of excellent teachers.” This policy report led to a revision in 2007 of the standards for establishing graduate schools and, in 2008, a revision of the standards to establish universities. The latter revision stipulates that “a university shall implement institutional training and research for improving class content and teaching methods.” With this change, FD, which had heretofore been a non-binding policy, became mandatory practice.

### 2.3.2 Evaluation of Educational Activities of Teachers

As mentioned earlier, the issue of teacher evaluation was first proposed by the Ad Hoc Council on Education. However, the issue did not resurface until some time after the transition from the Ad Hoc Council to the University Council. The 1994 policy report *Improvement in Recruitment of Professors* stated that, “it is necessary to strive for improving the evaluation of teachers so that excellent human resources can be secured for education and research activities at universities and maximize their abilities in accordance with their roles.” A report entitled *Facilitation of University Management*, issued the following year, stated that, “teacher evaluation is a very important factor for ensuring university quality and a key means for realizing the principles, objectives and future plans of universities. Therefore, university presidents are requested to raise questions about issues such as criteria for selection and evaluation of teachers that are to be addressed holistically.” The report identified efforts to implement systems for teacher evaluation as indispensable for not only recruiting excellent teachers but also for improving the performance of existing teaching staff. A further report entitled *Further Improving Higher Education*, issued in 1997, expounded that, “it is essential to even more proactively consider methods of evaluating the educational activities of teachers.” The overlap of “evaluation of teachers” and “evaluation of educational activities” resulted in the creation of a new category, “evaluation of educational activities of teachers.”

Evaluation of educational activities has, so far, been an exercise in trial and error. Although several criteria have been used, including student feedback, numbers of classes, numbers of students, efforts towards FD, and employment status of graduates, none of these have emerged as a definitive measure. As individual circumstances for educational activities vary from teacher to teacher, it is difficult to develop a single external evaluation that is appropriate for all circumstances, unlike the evaluation of research. Therefore, evaluation of educational activities, in many cases, relies on teachers’ self-evaluations. In addition, the weight given to evaluations
in different categories differs from university to university. Research performance will be a key criterion for evaluating professors at a university that emphasizes research, while teaching performance will be important at a university that places more emphasis on educational activities. The important point here is the underlying belief that maximizing teachers’ educational and research abilities is crucial for revitalizing a university and that teacher evaluation is essential for invigorating educational activities.

Teachers have been more closely evaluated since 2004, when national universities were transformed into independent corporate entities. Such close evaluation is said to have started at Okayama and Nagasaki Universities. Briefly, a professor’s tasks are classified into four categories: “education,” “research,” “regional contribution,” and “administrative operation.” Performance in each category is quantified to arrive at an overall evaluation, which is reflected in the professor’s salary and research funding. This style of professorial evaluation is spreading to universities all around Japan. The precedence for such evaluation is provided by similar performance evaluations in business organizations. According to the National University Corporation Law, each entity (university) must formulate mid-term (6-year) goals and plans, which are subject to approval by MEXT. In addition, each national university must file a financial statement and performance report every fiscal year, to check progress with respect to mid-term plans and financial status. In this case, if a university introduces a system of teacher evaluation that reflects an evaluation in conditions of individual employment, it receives a higher evaluation in the form of a “significantly improved” rating. In this way, the policy encourages universities who are seeking to improve their reputation to adopt evaluation systems that differentiate in the treatment of professors based on their evaluations. Put simply, the evaluation system policy is guiding national universities to implement a teacher evaluation system. Universities that are anxious about their current situation or are not confident about themselves are more likely to be “guided.” In this manner, teacher evaluation systems have started to gradually penetrate into universities around Japan, despite resistance from some professors.

### 2.3.3 Revision of Standards to Establish Universities—From Educational and Research Capabilities to Teaching Abilities

The policy report *Future of Higher Education in Japan* (hereafter, *Report on the Future*), issued by the Subcommittee on Universities of the Central Council for Education in 2005, characterizes Japan’s higher education policy in the last decade as having shifted dramatically from “planning and regulating” to “envisioning and guiding.” In this context, standards for establishing universities have been relaxed. Most indicative of this change was the “Outline” of the *Standards of University Establishment* in 1991. The result of this relaxation of standards was elimination
of the division between professional and liberal arts education, coursework requirements, and standards for teachers' organizations. Curriculum structure had previously been fixed by law. With elimination of the divisions, each university began to develop its own structure, often causing confusion in faculty councils. In addition, this change prompted faculty council members to become more conscious of their role as teachers. Moreover, in the amended standard for establishing universities, the qualification for becoming a teacher of “being an expert in a major field of study with excellent knowledge and experience” was relaxed and replaced by the condition “having educational and research capabilities.”

Furthermore, the 2001 amendment of standards for establishment led to further revision of qualifications for becoming a teacher. Those qualifications were specified in Article 14, which stated that, “individuals qualified to become professors shall fall into any of the following categories or shall have teaching abilities that are considered to qualify them to teach at a university.” One of the key revisions was the replacement of “educational and research capabilities” with “teaching abilities” as a qualification. From this wording, it is apparent that universities are considered educational institutions with priority given to teaching over research. This, of course, does not mean that professors do not need to have research capabilities. Among the categories, referred to above which, qualifying individuals to become professors are the following related to research capability: (1) “those who have doctoral degrees (including ones granted overseas) and have a record of successful research,” and (2) “those whose research records are considered to be equivalent to that specified in the previous category.” However, some new categories were added, including (6) “those who are considered to have excellent knowledge and experience in the major field of study,” with the implication that research capabilities were no longer were a necessary qualification for becoming a professor.

Clearly, there is no guarantee that an excellent researcher is a good teacher. Many universities are unsure as to what kind of candidate they should hire: a person whose teaching abilities are unknown but who has an excellent research record, or a person who has less research experience an insufficient research record but is an excellent teacher. However, there was a clear expectation that universities would recruit teachers not only from among those with so-called academic careers, but also from among those having a broad range of backgrounds, including companies and non-academic organizations, in order to nurture the kind of human capital demanded by the times and by society. This means that the line separating university professors from elementary, junior high, and high school teachers has become blurred.

2.3.4 Establishment of Professional Graduate Schools

The standards to establish graduate schools stipulate the following as qualifications for teaching at the graduate level: “individuals qualified to teach at the master-level shall fall into one of the following categories and shall be individuals who
are considered to have high-level teaching and research abilities in their specialized fields,” and individuals qualified to teach at the doctorate level shall have “very high-level educational and research abilities.” In other words, both teaching and research abilities are expected. However, a different take on this emerged from a very different point of view. In 2004, a new system of “professional graduate schools” was inaugurated whose goal was to foster the development of professionals with high expertise in a given field. A unique characteristic of this system is the existence of “expert teachers.” While the professional graduate schools were established as a part of a new system to nurture legal experts, the standards state that, “courses for professional degrees need to be established and expanded in various fields in which high-level and professional knowledge and abilities at an internationally-accepted level are required, such as law, MBA, MOT (management of technology), public policy, and teacher training. The courses are expected to contribute to further agility and revitalization of the society as a whole by improving practical education and professional ethics that bridge theory and practice and by nurturing professionals with a high level of expertise in a variety of fields, coming from a broad range of backgrounds, including former company employees” (Report on the Future, 2005).

At law schools, the expert teachers are primarily judges and lawyers. In the professional graduate school for teachers, which began enrolling students in 2008, the expert teachers are mainly elementary and junior high school teachers. In contrast to conventional graduate schools in Japan that continue with the twin goals of research and education, such professional graduate schools were established with the specific goal of professional education which does not require the preparation of a master’s thesis.

Even before the establishment of professional graduate schools, a growing number of professors who had acquired substantial knowledge and skills in former non-academic jobs had been entering academic positions. The penetration of “vocationalism” has made it impossible to ignore the existence of professors who are at universities by virtue of their practical abilities and experiences, rather than having taken the orthodox academic path of graduate school to become researchers and professors (Amano 2006, p. 81). Former government officials, lawyers, researchers working for private companies, news correspondents, corporate managers, engineers, nurses, and school teachers have been accepted as professors. The ranks of new professors even include former prefectural governors. This is because the knowledge and skills acquired through vocational life are seen as critical to university education and such practical expertise has come to play an important role in university education. The penetration of vocationalism has dramatically changed the nature of undergraduate and postgraduate education and, at the same time, has led to a diversification of professorship. There are now many professors who have arrived at their current positions via non-academic paths, rather than the traditional academic path centered around the graduate school.
2.4 Introduction of the Limited Tenure System

The University Council issued a number of policy reports regarding tenure systems, including *Improvement in Recruitment of Teachers* (1994) and *Facilitation of University Management* (1995), followed by *Tenure System for University Teachers* (1996). These reports resulted in the enactment of the “Law Concerning Term Limitation of University Educators.” The three reports may be considered a three-part series aimed at re-energizing university organization and management in order to invigorate the educational and research activities at universities.

The report *Improvement in Recruitment of Teachers* called for each university, on a voluntary basis, to be flexible in hiring professors, adopt an open application system, improve selection criteria and methods, improve teacher quality, and hire more international professors. The underlying belief is that educational and research activities would be invigorated by bringing in teachers with experience at other Japanese or foreign universities or from a variety of other backgrounds, such as individuals with university degrees who had worked elsewhere.

The report *Facilitation of University Management* specifies measures to facilitate and improve university management according to three pillars: (1) facilitation of internal decision-making and implementation, (2) open management, and (3) cooperation between the executive board and educational organizations within the university. The transformation of national universities into independent corporate entities can be regarded as a revolution in management, resulting in a dramatic increase in the authority of the president and the system to support the president with the participation of an increasing number of outsiders in university management. However, with enhancement of the president’s authority, the authority of department chairs or heads of research groups over such issues as personnel issues and budgets has been weakened, lowering the latter positions to those of mere on-site leaders.

As indicated by its subtitle, “For revitalizing education and research at universities,” the report *Tenure System for University Teachers* was intended as a shot in the arm to help ailing universities. The policy report issued by the University Council justifies introduction of a limited tenure system in the following manner: “It is important to invigorate the education and research activities of universities by hiring excellent teaching staff with a variety of academic and experiential backgrounds and creating an environment in which they can engage in friendly competition that encourages improvement in their teaching and research abilities. It is important to creatively recruit employees and to increase flexibility in employment after they are hired. Flexible employment will lead to increased exchange between staff with differing backgrounds that will stimulate academic inquiry and will be effective in improving educational and research capabilities.” The report also makes the point that, “it has been suggested that it is difficult for some professors to explore novel ideas in their educational and research activities as they have been restricted to work within research themes and policies set by specific superior professors who have held the few available high-level positions over long periods of time.”
The limited tenure system is directly related to teacher status and each university is required, by introduction of the system, to take various measures and to endeavor to assign teachers more flexibly. Many universities have introduced a tenure system based on the requirements of the law, but only in a limited manner that has not necessarily led to more flexible assignment of teachers. While limited tenure systems have been applied in specific areas such as project-based employment represented by the COE program, younger staff such as assistant professors, and professors from foreign countries, it has not been applied universally and flexibility in teaching assignment remains a challenge. Traditionally, Japan has valued lifetime employment and forcible layoffs or transfers are extremely rare. It would seem that implementing more flexible employment in such a cultural context is difficult.

As stated in the policy report *Facilitation of University Management*, “it is important to increase flexibility in an early stage for young teachers.” Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of those hired within the limited tenure system are young researchers. How useful this system is for revitalizing educational and research activities remains to be seen. On the other hand, the limited tenure system is also linked with instability in the social status of such young researchers. As a result of the expanding enrollment in graduate schools in the last two decades, it has become increasingly difficult to get a job at a research institute such as in a university even after the completion of a doctoral degree. Coupled with this background, the limited tenure system has led to a precarious status for young researchers. As reported in the book *Higher-educated Working Poor* (Mizuki 2007), graduate school students tend to avoid research jobs due to the very slim possibility of being hired at a university. Given this situation, will the introduction of the limited tenure system succeed in terms of securing excellent human resources? The policy report of the University Council states that the introduction of the system is not a goal in and of itself, but is a means to achieve revitalization of educational and research activities through the flexible assignment of university positions. Young researchers are forced to compete under precarious circumstances while senior researchers cling to their vested rights, causing conflict between both generations.

### 2.5 Inauguration and Expansion of GP (Good Practice)

The 21st Century COE (Center of Excellence) Program began in 2002, based on the *Structural Reform Policies on Universities* issued in June of 2001. The program was introduced to increase international competitiveness by providing intensive support for establishing world-class research and education centers in Japanese universities to improve research quality and nurture creative human capital capable of becoming global leaders.

The Program to Support Unique University Education, or Unique Good Practice or educational COE was established the following year. This educational program soon spread to university faculty and staff under the name GP (Good Practice). The main criteria for evaluation centered on “excellent and successful efforts” specified under the Unique Good Practice guidelines and universities started to compete for approval as a GP university. Universities endeavor to achieve GP-certification, not
only because GP-certification makes universities eligible to receive financial assistance for new educational programs from the national government, but also because the GP designation is beneficial in terms of public relations, indicating that the university is making significant efforts to provide excellent education.

The Program to Support Efforts for Modern Educational Needs, or Modern GP, began in 2004, aimed at promoting revitalization of higher education. The program, in consultation with various councils, selects themes related to issues for which there is high public demand and provides funding to support high-quality project proposals from universities dealing with these themes that are selected through a competitive application process. In contrast to the Unique GP, the Modern GP places greater emphasis on novel approaches and ideas rather than past performance. Priority themes, for which excellent projects have been selected, have included “Contribution to community revitalization,” “Fostering Japanese who can use English in business,” “Practical distance education using IT (information technology),” “Promotion of practical education for general careers,” and “Promotion of environmental education for sustainable society.”

In addition, the Program to Support Students Associated with New Social Needs, or Student-Supporting GP, began in 2007. The objective of this program was to identify and provide financial support to exceptional and unique efforts for institutional and holistic support to students from entrance to graduation from university, junior college, or technical college that were expected to produce remarkable results. In 2008, the Unique GP and the Modern GP programs were merged to form the Program to Promote High-Quality University Education. In addition, GP programs targeting graduate school education and brush-up programs for returning students were established, resulting in, perhaps, an overabundance of GP statuses.

More time is necessary before we can evaluate how these GP policies have contributed to revitalization of university education and whether they have benefited students. GP funding has been criticized as being pork-barrel spending for universities and there is no guarantee that GP programs will continue in the future. However, this represents the first case in Japan’s history in which universities have competed on the basis of their educational programs, and it is undoubted that the GP policies have stimulated university education. GP funding has led to the creation of new educational programs, improved the overall teaching ability of teachers, and greatly contributed to making university professors more conscious of their teaching role. Only a handful of universities can apply for programs such as the 21st Century COE Program or the Global COE Program. Basically, only universities that not only have doctoral courses but also have a proven track record for producing cutting-edge research are eligible to apply. Such universities represent only a small fraction of the total number of universities. On the other hand, the educational program targets all higher educational institutions, including universities, junior colleges, and technical colleges. It is certain that the budget for individual GPs is insignificant compared with the huge budgets for COEs. However, universities and junior colleges that have won the GP status span a wide range of institutions and the policy is accessible to almost all institutions of higher education and hence to their faculty and staff. The GP policies have encouraged a large majority of university employees to become conscious of the educational role of universities.
2.6 Concluding Remarks

The change in professorship that has taken place in the past two decades reflects the “educational revolution” that has occurred at universities in Japan. The US has served as the model and great effort and money have been spent to introduce US-style higher education to Japan. In exchange for export of automobiles and electric appliances, Japan has imported, in addition to grains and aircraft, the spirit and methods of university education.

While it is certain, as evidenced by programs such as the COE, that money to improve the research quality and to support university professors as researchers has increased, the efforts of councils involved in university matters have focused on improvement and revitalization of university education. The result has been an expectation that professors become aware of their role as teachers, and since change in consciousness alone does not lead to changes in practice, effort has been made to implement concrete measures such as making FD mandatory, evaluation of professors’ educational activities, and reform of teaching qualifications. These changes have led to enhancement of the teaching role of professors and to increased time spent in educational activities. However, if professors are responsible only for teaching, they are no different from junior high and high school teachers. The distinction between professors and school teachers comes from the former’s role as researchers. In this sense, the distinction between universities and other educational institutions and the distinction between university professors and school teachers has become muddled. In contrast, the division of labor within universities is increasing, with a handful of professors specializing in research and the majority of professors focusing on educational activities.

At present, Japanese universities are faced with the challenge of formulating new curricula and diploma policies as a result of the “educational revolution.” Now, even the content of syllabi is dictated under the slogan, “What is important is not what the students learn, but what they will be able to do.” That said, it is difficult to control activities that occur behind the closed doors of classrooms and much room exists for individual professors to do as they see fit. Professors’ mindsets will not change overnight and there is always Japan’s cultural context. It seems that despite the vast amount of energy spent on the “educational revolution,” the results have not necessarily been satisfactory.

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