

■ Topics : Letters from alumni

Johannes Effenberger

Scientific Associate
 Institute of Urban and Industrial Water Management
 Faculty of Environmental Sciences
 Technische Universitaet Dresden (TUD)

I have had the good fortune to have been an exchange student at the Geo-Environmental Evaluation Lab under the supervision of Professor Makoto Nishigaki from September 2009 to September 2010. My stay was kindly funded by the German Academic Exchange Service through a mutual exchange program which was co-established by Professor Peter-Wolfgang Graeber (TUD) and Professor Nishigaki. Having finished three of five years of my diploma course on water management at the time of my arrival at Okayama University, I was eager to experience student life in Japan as well as Japanese culture, and of course, food.

The most amazing part of student life at Okayama University for me was how close students of different ages, as well as lab associates worked and studied together. Of course this includes mutual support in their research assignments, maintenance tasks, and organization of get-togethers and celebrations.

Regular meetings and presentations about research assignments were a great asset for me in understanding the various approaches to different scientific problems. For students, this is an ideal opportunity to understand scientific methods and exchange experiences and knowledge in order to avoid mistakes and misinterpretation of collected data. When comparing student life in Okayama to the student life in Germany, I have to admit that the Japanese way actually resembles my work life as a researcher rather than my life as a student in Germany.



When I returned to Germany to finish my studies, I had two more years before graduation. This gave me the opportunity to welcome two exchange students from Okayama University through the mutual exchange program and return some of the favors I was given during my stay in Okayama. These included visits to the immigration office, finding an apartment, and opening a bank account. Of course, we also spent our spare time together and shared many happy moments. After graduation, I was offered a position by my graduation supervisor at university. Needless to say I accepted and have been working as a scientific associate at TUD ever since. In my time working at TUD, I have contributed to and given lectures, worked on several research projects, and supervised the graduation of students. The time at the University of Okayama has contributed greatly to my communication and team skills and it made me understand the scientific process.

Unfortunately, with the retirement of Professor Nishigaki and of Professor Graber, the mutual exchange program between Okayama University and TUD is about to end. As a member of the German branch of the Okayama University International Alumni Association and as an alumni of TU Dresden, I would like to see the exchange between the two universities continue. This will require one professor of each university in comparable research fields to agree on another exchange program. As an alumni branch, we see one of our responsibilities in facilitating the academic exchange between German universities and Okayama University by supporting Japanese and German exchange students or aiding in the organization of exchange programs.