

“The culture’s really different here”: Facilitating successful intercultural encounters at the University of Tokyo

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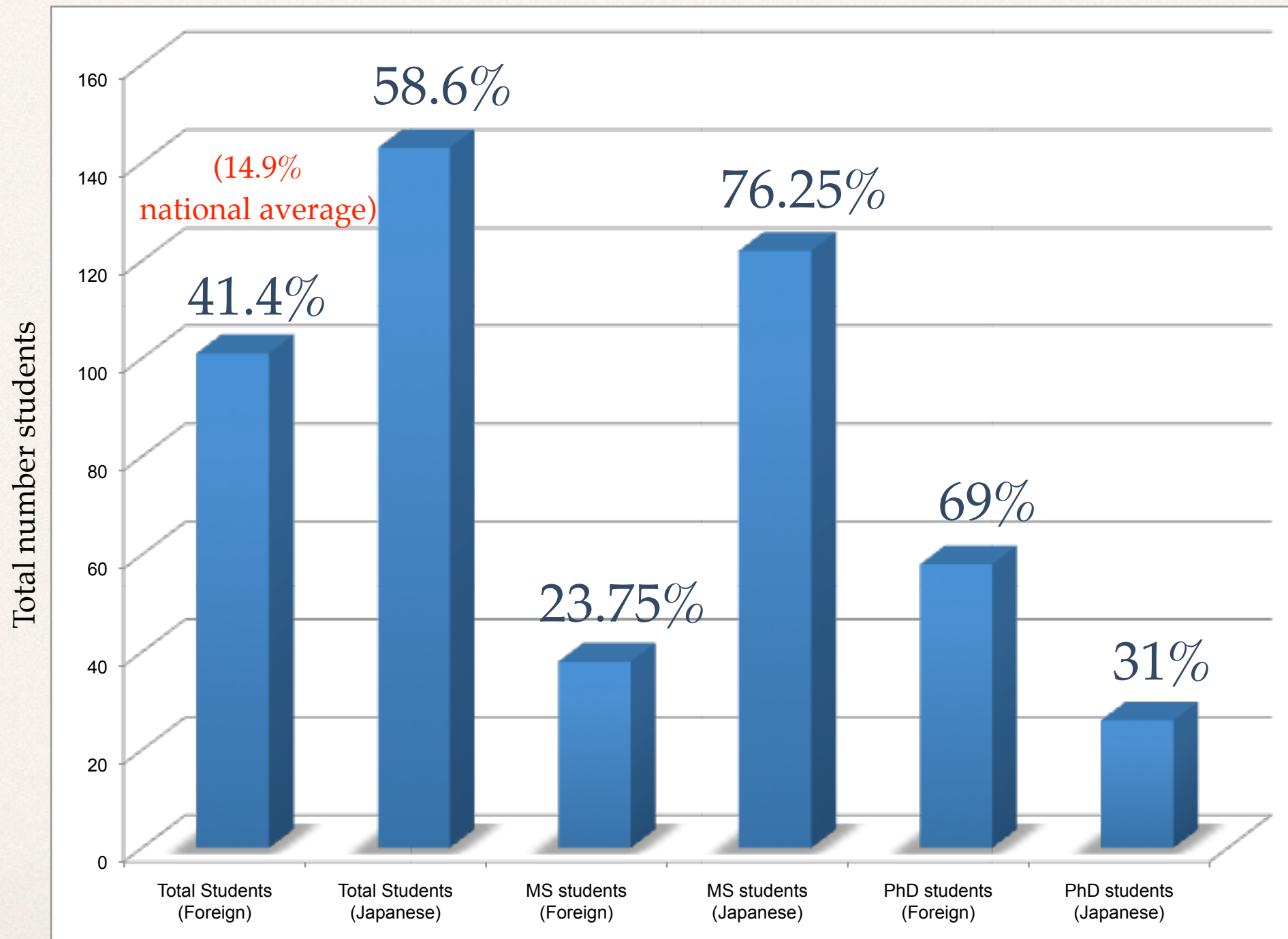


Department of Civil Engineering, University of Tokyo

Incoming students: Where are they from?



Postgraduate student population - Department of Civil Engineering, University of Tokyo



Survey of foreign students (August 2013)

- ❖ To better understand our foreign students' experiences of studying at the University of Tokyo
- ❖ To identify ways to improve the service we offer foreign students in the Department of Civil Engineering

Sample comments: ‘Tutors’ (mentors)

- ❖ “Tutors are very helpful, but sometimes they can make us feel like we are not in control over our own options. It would be great if tutors could take us to places with English services, so we can be part of the decision making.” (*Amae: ‘indulgent dependency’*)
- ❖ “There is a need to tell tutor about the Halal food availability in the university premises. They don’t have any information in this regard at all.”
- ❖ “It would be a great improvement however if the Todai students had more confidence in interacting with foreigners [...] I don’t see why they should be afraid of interaction with us. Foreigners are not evil, better or strange, we are just ordinary people who are different from you.”

Amae - 'indulgent dependency'

- ❖ “[...] amae is experienced by the child as a "feeling of dependency or a desire to be loved", while the mother vicariously experiences satisfaction and fulfillment through overindulgence and overprotectiveness of her child's immaturity. The assumption is that subsequent Japanese social bonding - teacher-student, supervisor-subordinate, etc. - is patterned after the primary mother-child experience.”

(Smith & Nomi, 2000)

The myth of foreign students as ‘internationalising agents’

“A long-standing myth is that more foreign students on campus will produce more internationalized institutional culture and curriculum. While this may be the expectation of universities, reality often paints a different picture. In many institutions international students feel marginalized socially and academically and often experience ethnic or racial tensions.” (Knight 2011: 14)

Tutor training: Goals

- ❖ To raise awareness of the difficulties for international students, associated with adapting to a new & unfamiliar culture
- ❖ To improve tutors' ability to empathise with alternative cultural perspectives
- ❖ To facilitate successful initial intercultural encounters between tutors and new arrivals

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1978)

7 'facets' in transformative learning:

- * 'Disorienting dilemma': An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true & what has just been experienced (cognitive dissonance)
- * Articulating assumptions: recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated & are largely unconscious
- * Critical self reflection: questioning & examining assumptions
- * Being open to alternative viewpoints
- * Engaging in discourse: evidence is weighed, arguments assessed & alternative perspectives explored
- * Revising assumptions & perspectives
- * Acting on revisions

(Cranton 2002: 66)

Student interviews: Listening task

Student interviews: Starting a new life in Tokyo

Watch the interview extracts of foreign students talking about their experiences in the first few weeks after arrival in Japan. Make notes below of any points they raise which might influence your role as a tutor.

Name (Country)	Notes
1. Min Ju (Korea)	
2. Jing (Thailand)	
3. Sunshine (Philippines)	
4. Ida (Indonesia)	

Sample student interviews



'Cos the culture's really different here

Tutor orientation - discussion



Tutor feedback: Evidence of critical self-reflection

- ❖ “Foreign students feels more lonely in Japan that I think. It is the most important for us to be friendly with them, even if we are not good at English.”
- ❖ “Actually I didn’t know they had quite a few problems getting fixed to Japan culture. I was especially surprised by the food problems, mainly from muslims and vegetarians.”
- ❖ “Actually I got to feel responsibility, because some international students referred to problems with their own tutors. It’s not just work to tutor someone.”
- ❖ By watching video and hearing opinions of international students, I reflected my self as a tutor, and I want to be a better tutor.”

Tutor feedback ($N = 25$)

Was the video helpful for working as a tutor?



Facilitating successful intercultural encounters

- ❖ “Internationalisation creates the opportunities for intercultural encounters. But whether they actually come about is another matter [...] and even if encounters do come about, they can fail.” (Wächter 2010: 46)

Thank you!

ありがとうございました。

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Overview of the pilot survey

- ❖ Link to the survey sent to 100 graduating Civil Engineering international students
- ❖ 63 completed surveys received (63%)
- ❖ 14 sections (45 questions) attempt to cover all aspects of life at the University of Tokyo (identified as important by foreign students):
 - (a) Application procedure; (b) Arrival in Japan; (c) Housing; (d) Registration issues; (e) Travel to university; (f) Lectures; (g) Making friends; (h) Internet access; (i) Financial matters; (j) Library services; (k) Communicating in English on campus; (l) Meeting dietary or religious needs on campus

Overview of the pilot survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GGR9JX6>

SurveyMonkey, Inc (US) | <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=nUUZmTXo0V3hk3r%2bm8KeFA%3d%3d>

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Foreign Students' Survey: The Todal Experience

Application procedure

20%

*** 4. How clear were relevant the university websites for students wishing to apply to Todai?**

Very unclear Unclear Average Clear Very clear

☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐

Comments

For non-Japanese speaker, seeing kanji can give a fe

*** 5. How would you describe the overall application procedure when applying to study at Todai?**

Unsatisfactory Poor Adequate Good Excellent

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Comments

*** 6. How would you describe the application forms you were required to complete, and their accompanying explanatory notes?**

Unsatisfactory Poor Adequate Good Excellent

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Comments

*** 7. How would you describe the help you received from Todai staff to complete the application procedure?**

Unsatisfactory Poor Adequate Good Excellent

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Comments

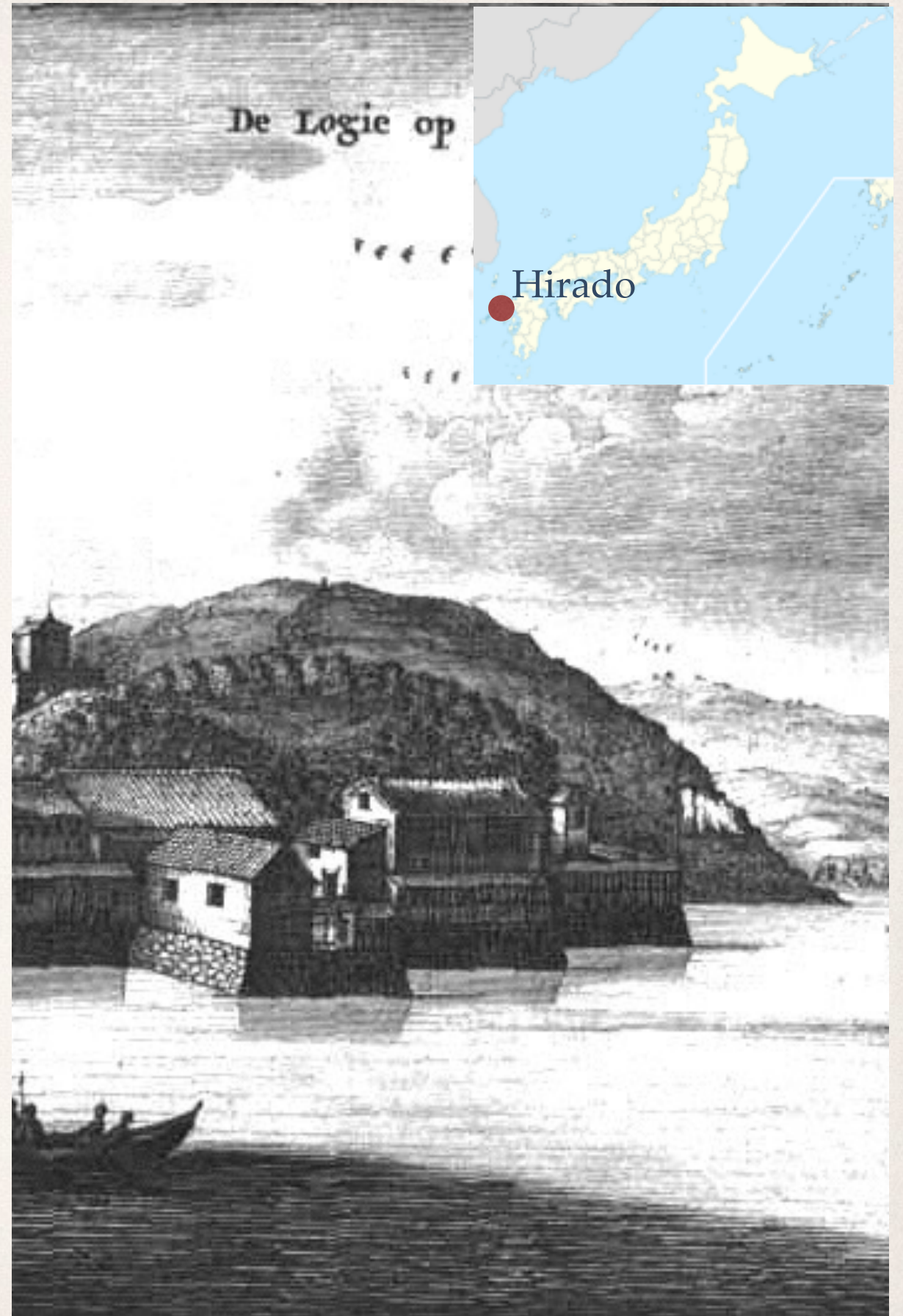
Japan - an inward-looking & homogenous society

“When I went to Manila to learn English last year and when I traveled around Europe countries in this spring vacation, I realized that unthinkable foreign ideas for us Japanese or contacting with another cultures and values make us realize how narrow our view of the world are!” (University of Tokyo student)

鎖国 (Sakoku: “closed country”)

(1633 - 1853) “The Land of the Rising Sun had entered a period known as *sakoku* - the closed country. She had seen enough of troublesome foreigners and their bitter internecine wars. Now, after a century of contact, Japan closed her windows on the world and denied traders entry into her profitable markets and cities. The few mariners who dared to sail there - or were unlucky enough to be shipwrecked - found themselves arrested, tortured and killed.”

(Milton 2002: 370)



Internationalizing Japanese universities

- ❖ 1997 government report: “Japanese higher education institutions must become ‘international centres of learning’ to which students and scholars of the world are attracted.”
- ❖ Establishment of programs in English considered consistent with this goal
- ❖ By 2001, 78,812 international students in Japan - 80% from China, Korea or Taiwan (engineering 33%; humanities 14%)
- ❖ ‘Asian regional center’, rather than a ‘global center’

(Tsuneyoshi 2005)

Impediments to internationalizing Japanese universities

- ❖ Language barriers: “Japan is the most disadvantaged industrialised nation in terms of the present international language power structure, which rotates around the English language. Japan is a non-western country and, not being a former western colony, does not have any strong links to a western language at any educational level.” (Tsuneyoshi 2005: 68)
- ❖ Poor intercultural skills of Japanese students & faculty
- ❖ Limited & expensive student housing
- ❖ Lectures often irrelevant to international students

Sample comments: ‘Tutors’ (mentors)

- ❖ “The system of providing a tutor is wonderful and it helped me settle in Japan very quickly.”
- ❖ “My tutor here was living with her parents and had no idea about buying basic things like cleaning products and things for daily life, all in all she was a nice girl but not really suited as a tutor.”
- ❖ “I really appreciate having a Japanese tutor. However, I think the Japanese tutors must be also informed that the Japanese railway system is not easily navigable for first timers in Tokyo. For example, tutors must be informed that it is not advisable to meet in big stations and that exact information about exits and markers must be given.”

Results: *Average ratings*

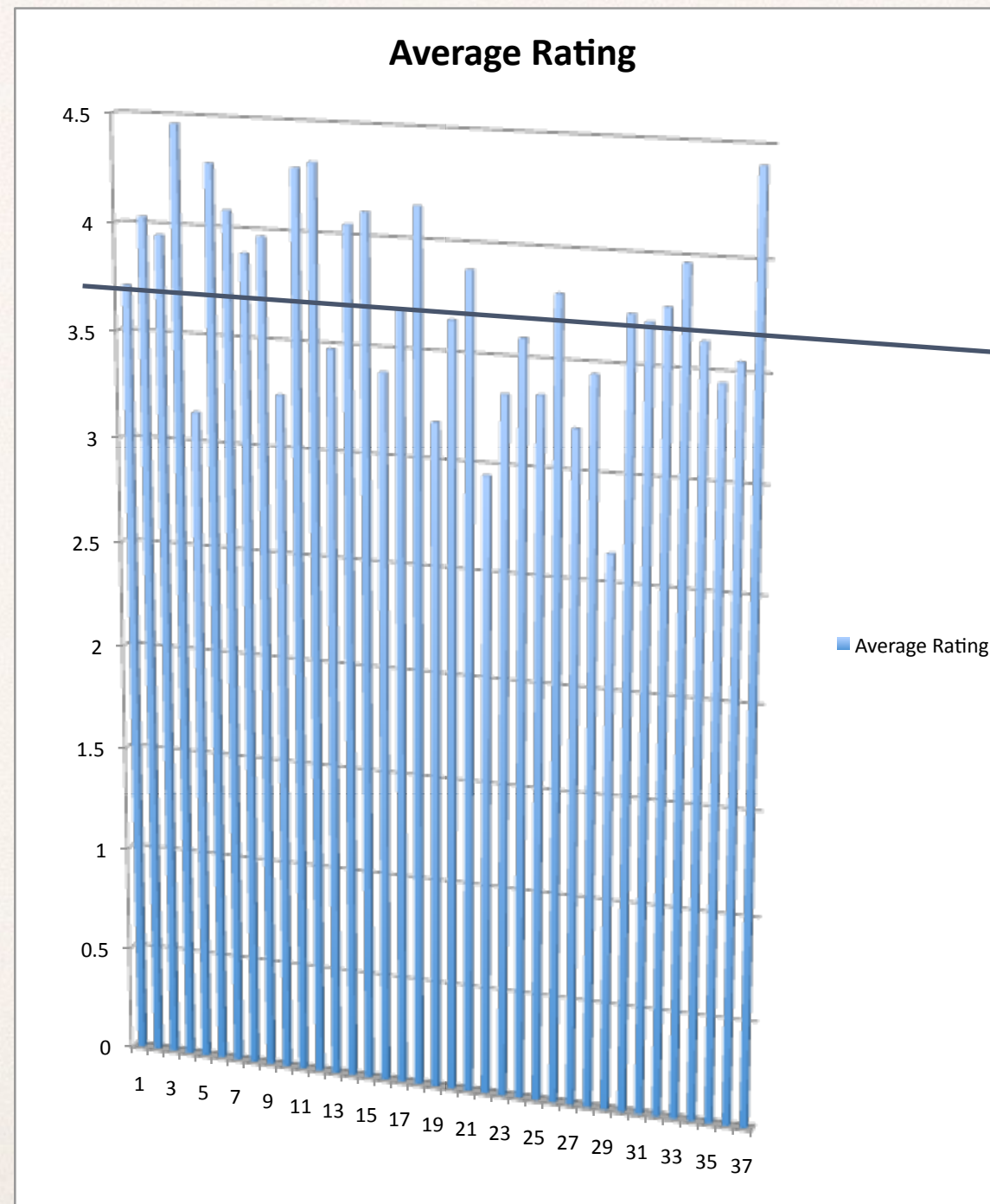
Excellent

Good

Average

Poor

Very poor



Mean = 3.71

Lower ratings

- ❖ Information on cheap places to buy food / clothes in Tokyo
- ❖ Help with making Japanese friends
- ❖ Time taken to receive final decision on application
- ❖ Getting a university internet account
- ❖ Choice of dormitory