U CR Extension partners with some 250 institutions around the world. Thirty-five years ago, however, there was just one—and the vision for the partnership was way ahead of its time. The year was 1984 and while we were watching “Ghostbusters,” dancing to Wham!, and lining up to buy the first Apple Macintosh, UCR and Josai signed their first Sister University agreement—and set out to design a new future for their students.

Over the course of the decades-long association, UCR Extension has welcomed more than 4,000 students from Josai University (JU), Josai International University (JIU), and Josai Junior College (JJC), while sending a multitude of UCR instructors and students to work, live, and study in Japan.

“UCR Extension’s partnership with Josai is our most historical, and it is a model for deep collaboration,” said Cynthia Welle, assistant director of the International Education Programs. “Collectively, the students of Josai have made a profound cultural impact on our campus and community...
through their participation in our programs, visits to local schools and businesses, community service, and stays with our homestay families. In return, Josai provides exceptional care for the experience of UCR students, staff, and faculty who visit their campuses in Japan.”

An important key to the success of the partnership is Josai’s commitment to helping their students adjust to life in the US. Josai staffs UCR with a full-time “resident director” who lives close to campus, and serves as mentor, teacher, counselor, and honorary UCR Extension staff member. The resident director makes certain that the students stay at the top of their academic game—yet, still find time for trips to the beach, a day at Disneyland, or shopping in Beverly Hills. Resident director Naoki Nakajima, of Josai Junior College, says, “These exchange opportunities are unique experiences that my students and I cannot benefit from in Japan. I enjoy working with the UCR staff, and sharing this adventure as our students adapt, grow, and become more internationally minded.”

The spirit that has fostered such a fruitful collaboration was on full display in a recent interview with JIU’s President, Dr. Kenji Sugibayashi. He likened universities in Japan to “multicultural hubs,” and sees innovative partnerships like the one they share with UCR Extension as vital to Japanese society. “Through study abroad programs and here, on JIU’s campus, students can interact with overseas students and experience multicultural coexistence, learn about other cultures, and respect people’s feelings living in those areas,” Sugibayashi said.

A real-life example of how a study abroad experience can change your life is UCR student Justus Ross. Ross was a recipient of the Seung Family Scholarship, a fund that supports UCR students looking to travel abroad and study at UCR Extension partner institutions—and he chose JIU. “I not only had my preconceived perception of Japan changed, but in turn I was able to change Japanese people’s perception about not only me, but also foreigners in general, which I didn’t even know I had done at the time,” Ross said.

Perhaps not surprising, given the innovations by JIU toward creating a true international campus, is that Ross’s richest experiences happened outside the classroom. “I was able to learn so many surprising things about life in Japan from interacting with students,” he said. “They would put their best foot forward to become my friend. I realized that simply trying to communicate and being willing
to listen helps you grow a wider understanding of your world. Doing this outside the classroom is where I was most able to gain a deeper understanding of not only the friends I made, but also of Japan and its culture.”

The theme of exchange and multicultural understanding was evident at last spring’s ceremonies celebrating the JIU and JU incoming freshman classes. Attending the ceremonies was Dean Vaughn, who has now experienced the fruitfulness of the partnership on both sides of the ocean. “One of the highlights of my first year as dean was participating in the opening ceremonies of our three oldest international partners. Receiving an invitation to the ceremonies at the Saitama and Togane campuses was such an honor, and participating was an even greater honor,” said Vaughn. “Speaking to the thousands of first-year students and their parents, alongside the chancellor and presidents of the universities, as well as mayors of the cities, highlighted to me what international education is all about: bringing people of different cultures together and crossing borders with mutual respect and understanding.”

Visits like Vaughn’s demonstrate the continuing strength of the international bond. “Though it is the oldest, the partnership with the Josai University Educational Corporation remains one of the strongest, most vibrant, and most important institutional relationships we maintain,” said Welle. “Due to the longevity of the partnership, the relationships our campus has with Josai run deep—our valued colleagues there are also our friends, with whom we share a common goal: to open up the world and change lives here and abroad. The future is gold with partnerships like ours.”

To learn more about becoming an international partner with UCR Extension, email Associate Dean Jean-Bernard “JB” Adrey at jbadrey@ucx.ucr.edu.

Become a homestay family and share a once-in-a-lifetime experience with an international student. Visit www.iep.ucr.edu, email homestay@ucx.ucr.edu, or call 951.827.4346.

Are you a UCR student hoping to study abroad? The Seung Family Scholarship generously provides funding for students like you. Expand your horizons and change your life! For more details, email Shannon Mead at smead@ucx.ucr.edu, or call 951.827.1639.