Statistics Research Opportunities Abound in Japan

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Several years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in a summer research program in Japan, sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF). During that summer, I met Takashi Yanagawa, a well-known biostatistician who served as my host advisor. I have since kept in contact with Yanagawa and other statistics researchers in Japan. Through these contacts and my research experience, I have discovered many attractive research opportunities for current graduate students and those interested in postdoctoral/visiting positions.

Graduate Student Opportunities

For graduate students, one of the best ways to gain exposure to research in a foreign setting is through the summer research programs sponsored by NSF. These programs, collectively known as the East Asia and Pacific Summer Institutes (EAPSI), provide U.S. graduate students in science and engineering with unique research experiences in Australia, China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The institutes last roughly eight weeks, from June to August. Mastery of (or even exposure to) the corresponding foreign language is not a prerequisite for participation. For more information, visit www.nsf.gov/eapsi.

Postdoctoral Opportunities

The NSF Office of International Science and Engineering (OISE) can help fund international postdoctoral fellowships. OISE supports programs to expand and enhance leading-edge international research and education opportunities for U.S. scientists and engineers, especially at the early career stage. More details can be found at www.nsf.gov/od/oise.

Additionally, graduates who are U.S. citizens may apply for grant opportunities from the National Academies, www.nationalacademies.org.

The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) also provides funding opportunities for foreign researchers. Researchers can apply for the JSPS program, Postdoctoral Fellowships for Foreign Researchers, for a short-term visit (15 days–11 months) or a longer visit (12–24 months). See “Funding Opportunities in Japan” at www.nsfjtokyo.org for further details.

Host Institutions

During the application process for either EAPSI or postdoctoral/visiting positions, the applicant will have to select a host institution. Below are descriptions of three major statistics research centers in Japan. This list is certainly not exhaustive, but it serves as a good starting point for those interested in pursuing research opportunities in Japan.

Institute of Statistical Mathematics

As its name would imply, the Institute of Statistical Mathematics (ISM) is one of the main centers for statistics research in the nation. ISM is located in Tokyo, so faculty members can interact with other researchers at the major industrial plants and at nearby academic institutions.

With an academic staff of more than 50 and several research groups, any graduate student or postdoctoral fellow will surely find common research interests with at least one or two of the faculty at ISM. Given the spectrum of ongoing statistics research and its central location, ISM is an obvious place to consider when surveying potential host institutions. More information about ISM can be found at www.ism.ac.jp/index_e.html.

Biostatistics Center at Kurume University

After retiring from Kyushu University, Yanagawa helped create the first academically sponsored biostatistics program in the nation. Known as the Biostatistics Center at Kurume University, it was formed in 2004 and currently offers both MS and PhD curricula. Yanagawa serves as Professor and Director of the Biostatistics Center and, under his supervision, the program has established itself as one of the leading centers of biostatistics research in Japan.

The center’s faculty and graduate students address a variety of research problems, including advanced survival analysis techniques and cohort studies. With a growing list of well-respected faculty, a very strong curriculum, and an impressive computing facility, the center offers an appealing place to do research, especially for those interested in biostatistics. For more information, visit www.kurume-u.ac.jp/english/~re9.htm.

Radiation Effects Research Foundation

In Hiroshima, research opportunities are available at the Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF). John Cologne, interim chief of the RERF Department of Statistics, said RERF is particularly interested in “new statistics/biostatistics PhDs with experience and/or an interest in environmental risk assessment and epidemiology.” Areas of interest include genetic and molecular epidemiology, statistical issues in biological dosimetry and covariate errors, mathematical modeling of biological phenomena, analysis of repeated measures, and survey data. He also mentioned that RERF provides assistance with relocation costs in addition to competitive salaries and benefits. More information can be found at www.rerf.or.jp/StatEng and staff.rerf.or.jp/~staff.