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NTID gets major funding, creates university partnership

In a first-of-its-kind effort to significantly improve education and career opportunities for the world's 6 million deaf and hard-of-hearing people, the Nippon Foundation of Japan is partnering with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and Japan's Tsukuba College of Technology (TCT) to establish a worldwide university network.



National Technical Institute for the Deaf CEO and Vice President for RIT Robert Davila, right, greets Nippon Foundation representative Yasunobu Ishii, left, on a recent visit to NTID/RIT. Also pictured is NTID interpreter Patricia Raymond.

The Nippon Foundation is awarding NTID \$911,700 to underwrite the first year of a five-year \$6.17 million project, the Postsecondary Education Network International (PEN-International). "We fully anticipate that this is the first step in a multi-year partnership with the Nippon Foundation to technologically link universities around the world that serve deaf and hard-of-hearing people," says Robert Davila, NTID CEO and an RIT vice president.

PEN-International focuses on helping universities apply state-of-the-art instructional technologies, improve and update their technical curriculum, and update their computer hardware and software for instruction. NTID and TCT will use their collective expertise in deaf education and technology to assist participating countries with faculty training, development of instructional products and application of the web, information technology and distance learning technologies to teaching and learning.

NTID and TCT faculty will teach various information technologies and operating systems, as well as various multimedia and off-the-shelf software packages. This project will also include student and faculty exchanges and joint ventures with information-technology industries.

The long-term goals of the project are twofold: to equip deaf residents of participant countries with the skills needed to compete in a high-technology workplace, and to prepare universities to share the knowledge and instructional products they develop with other colleges.

"PEN-International will enhance local capability and global networking at each participant institution. Participants will be moved from importers of 'know how' to self-sufficiency," says James DeCaro, research professor and former NTID dean who is the principal investigator and director of PEN-International. "As the project progresses, each institution will develop the capability to export what has been learned through the project to other programs serving people who are deaf."

Over the five-year life of the project, PEN-International will work in as many as 10 different countries, with Tianjin College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology in China being the first, and the Center for the Deaf at Moscow State Technical University in Russia to follow.

Founded in 1962, The Nippon Foundation is one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world. It previously awarded NTID two \$1 million grants to establish an endowed scholarship fund for deaf students attending RIT from developing countries.

NTID and Tsukuba College of Technology have worked closely together on instructional projects and technology transfer between their two institutions since TCT was established in 1990. "Our partnership with NTID to establish and conduct PEN-International is a logical extension of our already close working relationship," says Naoki Ohnuma, dean of TCT.

"This grant will have a very positive impact upon the educational conditions and the career prospects of deaf men and women around the world," said RIT President Albert Simone. "NTID's superior educational track record and RIT's internationally recognized leadership in distance education and information technology makes NTID uniquely qualified to provide the vision and the leadership for PEN-International."