

Japan crisis offers educators many learning opportunities

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Cathy Lemmon (left), international programs advisor in the Queen's University International Centre, and Laura Esford, student exchange coordinator in the International Programs Office in the Faculty of Arts and Science, recently shared the lessons they learned during last year's crisis in Japan with their colleagues at the Ontario Association of International Educators conference co-hosted by Queen's and St. Lawrence College.

When an earthquake and subsequent tsunami and nuclear meltdown hit Japan in March 2011, Laura Esford and Cathy Lemmon were thankful for the policies Queen's had in place to handle crisis and emergency situations for their students on international exchange.

"This was unprecedented," says Ms Esford, student exchange coordinator in the International Programs Office in the Faculty of Arts and Science. "We learned a great deal, and there's a lot for others to learn about this experience – about student care, communication, academic programming – and self-care during crisis management."

At the time, there were three Queen's students in Japan, two of them in the evacuation zone. Another was in South Korea, on a break from studies in Japan, and three others were weeks away from departing for the island nation.

Ms Esford and Ms Lemmon, international programs advisor in the Queen's University International Centre (QUIC), worked non-stop to ensure the safety of the students overseas, re-arrange study options, and communicate those options to the students and their families. They also met several times with the students planning to leave on exchange, calming their nerves and organizing new options.

"We prepare our students very well for going abroad," says Ms Lemmon. "We hope situations like this

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never happen again, but if they do, we know our students have been as prepared for them as they can be.”

Before travelling overseas, every Queen’s student must comply with the Off-Campus Activity Safety Policy (OCASP), which requires that most complete a risk assessment, as well as an online pre-departure orientation.

Ms Esford and Ms Lemmon recently shared their experience and learning outcomes with a group of educators at the Ontario Association of International Educators conference co-hosted by Queen’s and St. Lawrence College.

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