

## Profile:

### Professor Sarah Todd - Pro Vice-Chancellor International University of Otago



Professor Sarah Todd's love of all things Japanese started in her last year at school, with a Rotary student exchange scholarship. On her application form she asked to be sent anywhere where English wasn't the first language, so Rotary obliged and offered her Japan. Having studied French and Latin, this was definitely going to be a challenge but one that Sarah was all too ready to take on, and soon she was winging her way to the town of Yamato in Kanagawa-ken. Sarah arrived speaking no Japanese and found that her host family spoke no English, so for that year she became immersed in the language and the lifestyle offered to her. Her experiences varied from learning the arts of ikebana from her host mother to spending a day as a guest at a sumo stable, an activity rarely accorded to outsiders of the sport at the time.

At the end of her year, Sarah returned home to New Zealand and enrolled at the University of Otago, where she undertook a commerce degree in Marketing. Keen to retain her newly-acquired language, she also applied to study Japanese concurrently through Massey University, as Otago did not offer the language at that time. At the completion of her commerce degree, opportunities arose in the Department of Marketing and Sarah commenced lecturing while she continued on with postgraduate studies and completed her Japanese degree, eventually becoming the Academic Dean for the School of Business at Otago. This dual focus of learning opened up greater opportunities for Sarah to develop international relationships for the school, as well as encouraging the school's students to actively participate in the University's student exchange programme. From there, it was a natural progression for her to step into the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor International when the position became available.

Sarah regularly uses her Japanese skills with both visitors to the university (including the Japanese Ambassador to New Zealand), but also on overseas trips. Interestingly, she found herself conversing in Japanese with a Chinese academic in a remote part of China when it became apparent that Japanese was also his second language and not English. She is thrilled to find her ability in understanding Chinese characters, or Kanji, works just as well in China as it does in Japan, so Chinese menus are less of a mystery. Sarah says that apart from acquiring the language skills, learning Japanese has made her more culturally aware and sensitive to the needs of international students. She is also able to anticipate the challenges ahead for Otago students who wish to study abroad and actively takes part in their pre-departure preparation.

The combination of a language degree alongside her commerce doctorate has provided Sarah with a broad academic base that has accorded her many wonderful opportunities in return, academically and internationally.

**Jacqueline Yoshioka Braid**