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JAPAN | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION

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CLASS: 2009
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MAJOR1: English
ABROAD_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: Sophia University (CIEE)

COURSE_#1: Intensive Japanese 2
COURSE_#2: Visual Methods in Anthropology
COURSE_#3: Japan: Facing the New Millenium
COURSE_#4: Survey of Japanese Literature

TYPES_OF_COURSES: Combination of program and regular university courses

EXPLANATION_OF_COURSES: Japan: Facing the New Millenium is a half-credit, program-sponsored class. Intensive Japanese II is a regular course for foreign students that counts as two courses. The other two courses are regular university courses; although they're taught in English, the students are mostly Japanese.

COMMENTS_ON_COURSE_WORK: Class sizes tended to be in the range of 20-30 students; the largest was my anthropology class with 50 (and the professor wasn't happy with the number). The Intensive Japanese program has daily quizzes, daily assignments, and a fairly fast pace (it feels very much like a high school class, meeting three hours every day); other classes had a fairly easy work load.

Although I was satisfied with all my classes, the academics are definitely a step below Amherst's, and it's necessary to search for the better professors. I'd recommend students who come here to especially take a look at Prof. Shields (literature) and Prof. Slater (anthropology). I've heard poor reviews of the economics and history classes, though I haven't taken any myself.

Coming in the fall is doable, but challenging, because the Sophia exams take place as the Amherst spring semester begins. It was worth it to me not to lose the summer between junior and senior year (Sophia spring semester goes through the summer), but the scheduling is definitely awkward.

STUDENT_BODY_COMPOSITION: Varied greatly. "Facing the New Millenium" was all Americans. My Japanese class was half-Americans and half-other foreigners (from Brazil, Mexico, France, Germany, Thailand, and so forth). My anthropology class was nearly all native

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Japanese students, but many of them had experience living abroad for a year or two. The literature class was mostly foreigners.

COMMENTS_ON_TEACHING: The professors have office hours, similar to Amherst; since students rarely take advantage of them, I found it very easy to stop by professors' offices and talk.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE_PREPARATION_NEEDED: Any Amherst student would be prepared for this university.

DESCRIPTION_OF_HOUSING_&_MEALS: I stayed with a host family and received a lunch stipend, as well as a transportation stipend.

WHO_MADE_HOUSE/MEAL_ARRANGEMENTS: Housing is arranged by the CIEE program for dorm and homestay students. If you want to live in an apartment you can arrange with them to live independently.

LIVING_COSTS: ¥3000, after reimbursements - but I traveled a lot, so this could probably be managed more cheaply

MEDICAL_FACILITIES_AVAILABLE?: Yes - all students are automatically entered into an insurance program, with a medical facility on campus. However, I never used these services, so I can't comment further.

WHAT_PROGRAM_SERVICES_WERE_AVAILABLE?: We had two weeks of orientation, two sponsored trips (to Nikko and to Hiroshima), and various visits to Japanese corporations, etc.,

HOW_DID_YOU_MEET_LOCALS?: Join a club as soon as you arrive. The greatest advantage of Sophia is its huge student body of accessible Japanese students - get to know them!

DID_YOU_EXPERIENCE_DISCRIMINATION?: My host mother was critical of Chinese, Koreans, and blacks; but I know students here who haven't had any problems. Homosexuality seems to be fairly well accepted. Foreign women and foreign men are treated equally.

DID_YOU_TRAVEL?: There were planned excursions; I also traveled on my own during winter break and a long holiday.

WOULD_YOU_RECOMMEND_THIS_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?: This is a great program for students who are only interested in staying for one semester; orientation is very thorough, and you're right in the center of a top-tier Japanese university in the heart of Tokyo. You have a lot of freedom and opportunities to pursue a club, a research project, or a part-time job. However, for me, the academics aren't strong enough to spend a whole year here - Asian Lang&Civ majors would probably be better off with the Kyoto year-long program.

SUMMARY: My "career plans and global comprehension" is a tall order - when I think about my experience, it's more as an accumulation of small revelations, like the way the Japanese can talk for hours about food and where it comes from (women and men, country people and city people - it's a universal obsession), or how many set expressions and set rituals exist to make everyday life simple and familiar, or all the strange kinds of smiley faces that my friends use for text-messages.

But I think everyone should study abroad - I wouldn't trade those revelations for anything, even though my career plans haven't changed a bit.

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MAJOR1: Philosophy
ABROAD_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: Antioch College Buddhist Studies in Japan

COURSE_#1: Buddhist Development and Doctrine in Japan
COURSE_#2: Buddhism and Japanese Culture
COURSE_#3: Intermediate Japanese
COURSE_#4: Buddhist Theory and Practice
COURSE_#5: Independent Research

TYPES_OF_COURSES: Program sponsored courses

EXPLANATION_OF_COURSES: All of our instructors were hired specifically for this program, and with the exception of the Japanese language class, taught in English.

COMMENTS_ON_COURSE_WORK: The classes are definitely not as vigorous as Amherst classes. The Development and Culture class consisted mainly of three to four in-class essay tests. Also, you had to present one chapter in the Development and Doctrine class. I was rather disappointed with the Intermediate Japanese Class; it is more like a practice session of the Amherst Japanese course rather than a full course.

Practice and Theory consisted of writing three reflection papers and participating in all the activities such as the away trips and morning meditation. Independent research was a 12-16 pg paper on any topic of your choosing, provided that it had to do with Japanese Buddhism in some way. You had three weeks after classes ended to complete this.

The difficulty was in time management, especially because our weeks were often interrupted with program travel.

STUDENT_BODY_COMPOSITION: About twenty American students from all over the U.S.

COMMENTS_ON_TEACHING: Once again, the quality of teaching is not as vigorous as Amherst. However, the faculty are very accessible, especially since they are hired only for this program (and some of them will live at the same location with you while they are teaching). You

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see them daily, and it is not unusual to have lunch with your teachers after class or to casually arrange an office hour that very afternoon.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE_PREPARATION_NEEDED: It definitely helps to have some Japanese skills, but it is not required. More than half of the program students didn't know Japanese, and they did not have a problem. Also, some knowledge of Buddhism is helpful, but also not required. I didn't know anything about Buddhism prior to this program, and I didn't think it affected me too much. However, it is a really intense program, so if you don't think you would actually be that interested in Buddhism and its philosophy and practice, I would consider something else. There were a couple of students who really weren't interested in either Japan or Buddhism, and I don't think they got as much out of the program as they could have.

DESCRIPTION_OF_HOUSING_&_MEALS: Our main base was in the middle of Kyoto at a temple ten minutes by foot from Kyoto station. We shared this compound that had a kitchen, bathroom, bathhouse, and three bedrooms, slept on tatami mats and futons, and were responsible for chores in the morning. All twelve of our guys shared a really large room, while the eight girls were divided into two small rooms. We had breakfast together at the temple, and then were given stipends for lunch and dinner. A lot of people cooked, due to the kitchen, and it was cheaper.

Every couple of weeks we would have an away trip to a temple of the sect that we were currently studying. Those trips would usually take a couple of days. Our schedule on those trips were very packed, and we had all meals together, usually in the temples (very good Japanese vegetarian food). We also shared tatami rooms on those trips, though usually with less people than in Kyoto.

WHO_MADE_HOUSE/MEAL_ARRANGEMENTS: Yes. Besides the three week independent traveling and research, when you have to arrange your own living situations, everything was taken care of by the program.

LIVING_COSTS: Well, I spent about \$2000 overall on everything, from traveling to entertainment to daily needs. The program suggests \$1700.

MEDICAL_FACILITIES_AVAILABLE?: There was a hospital nearby. If you needed medical attention, one of the Japanese-fluent faculty would take you. Medical care in Japan is also way cheaper than in the United States, even without insurance.

WHAT_PROGRAM_SERVICES_WERE_AVAILABLE?: We had a three day orientation at the San Francisco Zen Center before we all left for Japan. That was really helpful for getting to know the other program people and to get a taste of Buddhist life.

HOW_DID_YOU_MEET_LOCALS?: Knowing Japanese definitely helps. We were affiliated with Ryukoku University while in Japan, and encouraged to make friends with the students there. Some people did, and it seemed very rewarding. Also, while in Kyoto, you will have a lot of free time, so use it to explore and get around and explore instead of staying in your room and taking naps. Try things like the public baths, restaurants only frequented by Japanese people, etc.

DID_YOU_EXPERIENCE_DISCRIMINATION?: Japan is still really sexist, but people are very polite and you will most likely not be harrassed. Nevertheless, sometimes people will express views that seem really backwards by western standards. However, as a woman I felt a lot safer in Japan than I do in the US, mostly because Japan is a much less violent country in general. For the most part, especially in Kyoto, the Japanese are very friendly towards Americans and will be welcoming especially when they learn that you are here to study their culture (and especially if

you can speak Japanese), though expect a lot of staring. They also, despite their politeness, can be condescending and expect you not to know anything. However, this often leads to excessive helpfulness which can often times be useful.

DID_YOU_TRAVEL?: There was definitely a lot of traveling. We had day trips every Saturday and away trips about every two weeks. The last three weeks are also reserved for your own traveling (while you also write your reserach paper).

WOULD_YOU_RECOMMEND_THIS_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?: I would definitely recommend this program, though be prepared. The schedule was rather hectic, and living so closely with twenty people can be intensed. That being said, knowing nothing about any of these subjects before I went, I now know so much about Japanese history and culture, as well as Buddhism. You get to experience a side of Japan that most foreigners do not ever see, that most Japanese people don't even experience. Not to mention, you'll meet all sorts of interesting people and make great friends with your classmates and faculty. So if you are interested in Japanese culture and/or Buddhism and don't mind new and unusual experiences, definitely consider this program.

SUMMARY: Well, I definitely want to return to Japan after I graduate now. It's such a fascinating country. Other than that, I feel like I have a much more comprehensive and open view towards religion than before I went.

