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JAPAN | SPRING, 2006 & ACADEMIC YEAR 2005-2006 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

FIRST: Catherine

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CLASS: 2007

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MAJOR1: Psychology

ABROAD: Spring 2006

PROGRAM: Temple University Japan

COURSES: U courses

COMBO_EXPLAINED:

COURSE_EVAL: The quality of the Japanese Culture and the Japanese Art History classes taught by Professor Murai were top-notch and were not far in terms of discussion and professor quality from classes I would expect to see at Amherst. The Japanese beginners language course and the History course were closer in quality to a community-college level course. The Metropolitan Tokyo course was at a lower level and required frequent "short essays" but was not difficult or particularly challenging. 5 courses at this institution involved as much work (in terms of studying, exams, essays, other homework) as 4 courses at Amherst, but the reading was not as difficult or intensive. The class size varied from 5-40 in my experience. The grading was much more lenient and students were given more chances to redo and resubmit work. There were several required fieldtrips in all classes except the history class.

CLASS_COMP: In beginning language courses, the student body is entirely American (most of the foreign students tend to be from Temple main campus). The history of the English language course was mostly Japanese English speakers. The culture course was entirely American. The art history course was half and half.

TEACHING_EVAL: All faculty are extremely accessible, like Amherst faculty. The professors varied in their teaching methods and attitudes. Certain professors are identical with Amherst professors in that they try to foster an environment of inquiry and discussion. A common theme in the better classes seems to involve group projects or breaking off into groups during class time to individually discuss the topic before rejoining as a classroom to continue the dialogue. Other professors merely assigned copious amounts of homework and class lectures were long, tedious and uninformed.

ACADEMIC_PREP: It is not necessary to know any Japanese. The courses are all taught in English.

HOUSING_MEALS: I lived in a dorm that was a long bus ride commute (40 minutes or so) each way. The dorms reminded me of tiny New York apartments where the space was used very efficiently. The rooms were clean, and the dorm was in a building located in

the suburbs outside of Tokyo. The environment was extremely safe. There is a local supermarket where I purchased food to cook, I would purchase pre-made meals from the convenience store. Food averaged \$20-30 or so per day.

HOUSE_HELP: Yes, Temple provides several housing options, depending on your preference and budget. There is also the option to acquire your own housing.

LIVING_COSTS: \$6000 (including housing, food, transportation, entertainment) for four months

MEDICAL: No, there was only a nurse's office on campus, however all students are required to get Japanese National Insurance, so there is coverage

PROG_SERVICES: There was an extensive orientation period and many activities were planned. There is an office where students can discuss their issues or where they can get advice if needed. Also, each dorm has a resident counselor.

LEARN_HOST_COUNTRY: The activities planned by the institution were helpful. Also, in the classrooms, many Japanese students are present and eager to make friends. There are also many extracurricular clubs one can join.

DISCRIMINATION: None

TRAVEL: I traveled to Kyoto, Nara, and Osaka as well as to Mt. Fuji. There are a few holidays where students have extended weekends to take excursions.

RECOMMENDATION: Yes. This program is great for those students interested in Tokyo, in urban life, in popular culture or in Japan itself. I would highly recommend this program for students who are interested in Japan but may not have the adequate language skills/academic prerequisite courses to study at Doshisha or other universities. However, if a student has taken extensive Japanese language courses and wishes to practice the language, it may be difficult in Tokyo. Many Tokyo residents know how to speak English and one can get away with not practicing the language.

SUMMARY: I would highly, highly recommend studying abroad. It tested my limits and (although it sounds cheesy) I feel much more confident and independent from my experiences. I feel like it has broadened my knowledge of myself and the world and has given me a taste for wanting to explore and to understand new cultures and locales.

FIRST: Lola

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CLASS: 2007

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MAJOR1: Asian Languages & Civilizations

ABROAD: Academic Year 2005-2006

PROGRAM: Associated Kyoto Program

COURSES: Program

COMBO_EXPLAINED:

COURSE_EVAL: Classes were small and organized similarly to Amherst College lecture and discussion courses. The reading and work load were not large. It seemed feasible for students to not read the material and still receive good grades in courses. The academic schedule and calendar were parallel to Amherst College. All courses were taught by American professors and attended by American small liberal arts school students.

CLASS_COMP: All American college students. However, some of those students are themselves international, traveling to their U.S. schools for Korea, Thailand, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

TEACHING_EVAL: Overall, on all those points the quality was less than at Amherst. I was disappointed in the classes, which lacked the rigor of Amherst classes. The professors struggled to get us excited about the subjects, even though we were living in the midst of Japanese culture.

ACADEMIC_PREP: I think at least two years of Japanese language experience should be required. Students who struggled with the language had a much harder time becoming good friends with their families and the Japanese students in our midst.

HOUSING_MEALS: I lived with two host families during my year abroad. My first host family experience was very poor. I found myself with a family who had little time to spend with me because they were burdened by heavy amounts of stressful work. I was their 15th student, and they seemed to have lost all the excitement of having someone new in their home. I later learned that previous students had been unhappy during their time with the family as well, but hadn't reported their difficulties.

HOUSE_HELP: I requested a new family in November, and the woman in charge of housing (a Ms. Watanabe) was very reluctant to help me. She made me doubt the hardship of my situation. She did not finally help me switch families until the end of January. Once I had made the switch I was so much happier and healthier that she realized how important the switch had been. The experience was very frustrating and the delay seemed unnecessary and counter-productive.

LIVING_COSTS: I spent around \$700 each month.

MEDICAL: Yes

PROG_SERVICES: There was an orientation, although I wish it had been extended. There was also counseling offered. For a time I visited an American therapist in Kyoto (she talked me through my move, helping me find ways to discuss my problems with my previous family.) The abroad program paid for the counseling.

LEARN_HOST_COUNTRY: Become very active in seeking Japanese friends. Buy a cellphone as soon as you arrive, and ask for potential Japanese friend's numbers. Most

important at Doshisha University is finding a school club to join... It is very hard to make Japanese friends through this program because all of the classes are limited to American students.

DISCRIMINATION: No.

TRAVEL: Yes, I had many wonderful opportunities to travel, particularly during the regularly scheduled breaks (Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Spring break.)

RECOMMENDATION: For the time being, I would recommend it half-heartedly. My first months were very disheartening and difficult. However, if the student is very outgoing and willing to work hard to make friends, then the program can be wonderful. I hope that the staff begin exploring ways to expose U.S. students to Japanese students more thoughtfully.

SUMMARY: I am not yet sure how the experience impacted my education. I have discovered my serious academic interest in food culture, but that may have been a long time coming. I look forward to seeing what integrating back into Amherst will be like.



FIRST: Madeline
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MAJOR1: Asian Languages & Civilizations
ABROAD: Spring 2006
PROGRAM: CIEE Tokyo- Sophia University
COURSES: Combo

COMBO_EXPLAINED: Literature and Sociology are regular courses within the Faculty of Liberal Arts/Faculty of Comparative Culture. Japanese was also a regular course offered within that same faculty, but was mainly geared for foreign students.

COURSE_EVAL: Japanese class was about 20 students, a majority from United States colleges and universities but some from Europe and other parts of Asia, 5 days a week for three hours a day. Each week consisted of a one and a half hours of reading and grammar class with the latter half of class rotating between kanji class and oral class. Both work and examinations were frequent and difficult but the teachers were friendly, in general taught well, and were timely in their grading. A very good class for learning Japanese.

The literature course was around 60 students and each day was half lecture and half discussion. Most students were foreign exchange students. We read a series of Japanese short stories and novels including authors such as Oe Kenzaburo, Haruki Murakami, and others. There was a midterm and a final paper, both ranging between 5 and 10 pages and were very difficult.

The sociology course was primarily Japanese students with an English professor. There were four short papers (3-4 pages) that required students to examine points covered in lecture and in textbook readings. Papers were graded fairly easily although substantial effort must be put in to receive an "A" score.

CLASS_COMP: Japanese class: 80% American, 20% other exchange students

Literature: 90% American, 10% native

Sociology: 90% native, 10% exchange/American

TEACHING_EVAL: Teaching at Amherst is definitely a step above what I received at Sophia University but, unlike many Japanese universities, Sophia professors in the Faculty of Liberal Arts incorporate substantial discussion into their classes. Japanese students are not accustomed to discussion (not a large part of their earlier education) and therefore what discussion do occur are mainly led by foreign exchange students.

Professors are accessible during office hours and by e-mail and are willing to help students out as much as possible, similar to Amherst professors.

ACADEMIC_PREP: University courses require no academic preparation other than that you already receive by taking normal Amherst courses (ability to read, think critically, write, etc.). As for language, I would suggest at least taking Japanese Level 1 before thinking of entering Intensive Japanese 1 because it is a fast-paced course that demands a lot of you. A special focus on correct grammar and kanji as well.

HOUSING_MEALS: I lived in a CIEE-arranged home stay that provided me with housing in addition to breakfast and dinner during the school days and meals on the weekends. The family I lived with was warm and accepting and we had a wonderful relationship. I would highly advise choosing a home stay over a dorm, if given the option.

HOUSE_HELP: Yes, CIEE set up the home stays.

LIVING_COSTS: \$3000 for the semester including cell phone, meals out, entertainment, travel, and transportation

MEDICAL: Yes

PROG_SERVICES:

LEARN_HOST_COUNTRY: Live with a homestay family, join clubs, and don't be afraid to use Japanese even if you feel like an idiot. Get rid of your stereotypes quickly and be willing to try new things, get lost, and be a bit embarrassed.

DISCRIMINATION: If you do not look Asian, be prepared to get some looks and some discrimination when arriving to Japan. In Tokyo, this is not much of a problem but outside of major metropolitan areas foreigners are truly foreign and elicit odd looks and whispers. It's more a matter of curiosity than anything else. As for women, sexual discrimination is rampant here in the workforce but as a foreign exchange student you should encounter few problems. However, be aware on crowded trains and know that there are women-only cars during rush hour in response to problems of groping on the trains.

TRAVEL: CIEE included excursions to Nikko, Kamakura, Hiroshima, and Miyajima as part of the program. I also traveled on my own to Osaka and Kyoto.

RECOMMENDATION: I would recommend Sophia University to Amherst students interested in having a great experience at a very international university in Tokyo. Sophia is one train stop away from Shinjuku, a 20 minute walk from the Imperial Palace, and within 40 minutes walk to Yasukuni Shrine. The campus is large by city standards, it is a prestigious private university in Japan (unlike others like Temple), and it is famous for its exchange students. You will find that the clubs are more accepting of exchange students and that many, many students speak English so it's easier to find friends. In addition, classes are like Amherst's in their formatting and the Intensive Japanese classes will help you improve your Japanese language skills by leaps and bounds.

SUMMARY: Spending a semester abroad in Tokyo only reinforced my decision of being an ASLC major in addition to broadening my views not only on Japan but on the international community as a whole. I intend to return to Japan in the future to work and in general have decided to work internationally either immediately following graduation or in my future career.

FIRST: Tiffany

LAST: Chiang

CLASS: 2007

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MAJOR1: Asian Languages & Civilizations

MAJOR2: English

ABROAD: Academic Year 2005-2006

PROGRAM: Associated Kyoto Program at Doshisha University

COURSES: Program

COURSE_EVAL: The class sizes were fine. My largest class had about twenty people, but most of my classes were around ten people. The grading system was fine, and the work load was not especially heavy. The academic calendar went according to American colleges rather than the Japanese colleges, so it wasn't very different. The exam schedule worked well. Overall, I felt pretty good about the entire academic program. We had work, but it wasn't so heavy as to detract from our ability to enjoy our time in Japan.

CLASS_COMP: All were students from American colleges.

TEACHING_EVAL: The teaching quality was very good, and the faculty was very accessible.

ACADEMIC_PREP: Of course, the more Japanese one knows, the better, and the program already requires students to have at least one year of Japanese language study. I came after taking third year Japanese at Amherst, and I think that was a good level of language proficiency to come to this program with.

HOUSING_MEALS: I stayed at a homestay about forty minutes commuting distance from the school. My host mother prepared dinner every night. For lunch I was usually at school, so I ate at the cafeteria or elsewhere around the school, and breakfast was always available at my house, though I didn't always eat it. I stayed with a family of five, and it was a very good experience.

HOUSE_HELP: Yes, the host family was arranged through the program.

LIVING_COSTS: \$4000-5000 this academic year

MEDICAL: Yes

PROG_SERVICES: We had a three day orientation at Kyoto Tower Hotel before meeting our host families and starting classes. It was pretty helpful and a good way to get started. Counseling was available if you needed it.

LEARN_HOST_COUNTRY: Join community groups. For me, it was difficult to meet Japanese people at school because our group of American students was somewhat isolated in terms of classes and such, but I joined a karate dojo in my community. I was the only foreigner there, and it was a good way to get to know and interact with Japanese people. I think just staying with a host family is also a good way to get to know Japanese people and Japanese culture.

DISCRIMINATION: No.

TRAVEL: Yes, I had time to travel on my own during our breaks, and we had a class field trip to other parts of Japan once each semester, and that was very enjoyable.

RECOMMENDATION: Yes, it's an excellent way to improve your Japanese. It has a good staff and the homestay program is also pretty good. You have time to explore Japan

as well as study and learn about Japanese culture. Two semesters might seem long at times, but in the end, I really think it's worth it. I enjoyed my time on this program very much.

SUMMARY: I think studying abroad in Japan for eight months has been pretty good in terms of education. It allowed me to immerse myself in just Japan, and explore that more fully. It also let me take classes I wouldn't have had the opportunity to take at Amherst, such as The Game of Go, and it let me meet students from many other colleges in America with similar interests who I wouldn't have been able to meet otherwise. I'm not sure about my career yet, but I had been considering working in Japan, and having this long-term experience in Japan will be helpful in the future for evaluating if I really do want to live and work in Japan or not.

