Major/Minor: Global Studies

Country: Japan       Program: Meiji Gakuin University       Term & Year Abroad: Spring 2009

*What type of student should go on this program (ex: personality traits, major, etc)?
-f ranks (because of the close living quarters, dorm-like)
-in independent (can’t always rely on getting people to do what you want to do)
-global and international studies/relations majors (because the classes are specifically oriented towards international studies)

Instructors
- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?
Instructors were much more involved with students personally, especially due to the small class sizes.

- Could you call them by their first names?
No, you should always call them professor or sensei.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
I would say that it was more casual. You could always rely on catching your professors after class for a chat or problem.

- Were they available for help during office hours?
Although many professors didn’t specifically state it, they were generally known to always be okay for a meeting or conversation. Other professors had specific times and days they were available.

Courses
- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
Courses were about the same in terms of workload, but overall, less difficult to understand content.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
Yes, the grading was quite similar. Classes often included attendance as part of the overall grade.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
Most of the classes I took only had final papers at the end of the semester. One six-unit class required a group project as a midterm around the middle of the semester.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?
Should you choose to take a Japanese language course, there is one oral exam at the end of the semester. Throughout the semester, there are regular tests, quizzes, and homework for Japanese.

- Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?
Most students had final papers with a definite due, but you could always turn it in earlier.

- What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?
At this program, there is a UC Director who understands the nuances of what is required for UC students, so that was always very helpful.

- Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?
Yes, classes don’t fit into cookie-cutter major requirements. You have to research what will count and what classes can be combined to fulfill requirements. You also have to make sure you’re taking the right number of units. Though many other UC students you reside with may have the same major as you, you can’t always rely that they have to do the same things as you. Also, there are some things as a foreigner studying in Japan that you must do, like paying bills and picking up your registration card.

- **Was classroom participation expected?**
  Yes, especially because of the small class sizes, teachers expected conversation and questions.

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**
  MeiGaku’s classes were smaller, and my classes had more do with analyzing previous data and ideas, as opposed to thesis-based exams. Most of my classes have research papers due.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
  Meiji Gakuin’s courses are based around a period schedule (1st period, 2nd period, etc…)

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
  Class culture was polite, it was important to be alert and punctual, and it was best not to eat or drink in class, unless it’s water or with prior permission.

### Language

- **In which languages were the courses offered?**
  Because Meiji Gakuin is a major-specific program, prior knowledge of Japanese was not required. So the classes were in English with Japanese students who demonstrated proficient knowledge of English, and Japanese language classes were also offered.

- **What language did you take your courses in?**
  Mainly English, except for Japanese language courses.

- **If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.**
  Japanese is a difficult language, no matter where you study. During the first week (after arrival), you will take a Japanese placement test, unless you definitely plan on not taking Japanese, or have never taken Japanese before, in which case, you will be place in Japanese 1. Some students may choose not to take Japanese because it does require rigorous work, however, I highly recommend taking it. When you realize you’re actually able to read menus and street signs, it’s a great feeling of accomplishment. You’ll also have a huge support base, with eager Japanese students who will want to help you and other UC students who are also taking Japanese language classes. Plus, what better place to learn Japanese than Japan?

### Host University

- **How large is the university? Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)? Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building?**
  Compared to UCSB, MeiGaku is exceedingly small. You could easily walk across campus in 5-10 minutes. It’s basically placed in a suburban area, not too busy or loud. But you could also take classes at Meiji Gakuin’s other campus, which is located in one of Tokyo’s 23 wards. The Shirokane campus is even smaller, but offers a variety of different classes, not just for international studies majors.
- Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?
Local students usually live with their parents, sometimes close, sometimes almost exceedingly far.

- If not located in the city center,
  o How far or close is it to the city?
    10 minutes by bus, 25 minutes on foot.
  o What type of public transportation could you take – cost?
    Busses are frequent, and trains are usually reliable. Trains can go almost anywhere and are very frequent. They start at around 5-6 AM depending where you are, and stop at around midnight.
  o Could students take cabs -cost?
    Cabs are also very numerous, but they are just as expensive as in the U.S.
  o How long would it take to get to the city center?
    From the dorm, five minutes on foot.

- Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?
Plenty! At the beginning of the spring semester, the students of MeiGaku held a club fair of sorts.

- Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?
There is a bookstore on campus, as well as various other stores where you can buy books, school supplies, or food. You can buy your books on-campus in a separate building (co-op), but be sure to ask a Japanese student or buddy for help, as the order sheets are in Japanese, and they can also get you a discount!

- Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?
There is a vast computer lab on-campus, comparable to the SRB’s computer lab. Students get free printing, color pages included. Students can also bring laptops and request an LAN wire from the library, or bring their own.

- What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)
There are dozens of convenience stores in the surrounding areas by the campus, as well as various small restaurants. Totsuka station is also nearby, and it offers various cafes and restaurants inside.

**Housing**
- What types of accommodations are available to UC students?
UC students live in a dormitory. There are four floors, and each student gets their own individual room.

- How close are they to campus?
The international students dormitory is about 45 minutes away from the Totsuka campus.

- How did you find your housing?
UC students are required to live in the Meiji Gakuin International Student House (MISH).

- Where did you live and with whom?
We lived in Totsuka, Yokohama. UC students live with only other UC students.

- If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?
- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?
The rooms were of average size, but were very nice. Each student gets their own individual room, with their own private balcony. The floor is laid with tatami mats, and each room has a huge closet, an inter-dorm phone, and a desk with a desk chair.

- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?
Total rent was 2000 USD, about 500 USD a month, with a 250 USD deposit returned at the end of the term.

- How/who did you pay for housing?
You pay for housing at the accounting office on-campus, with a staff member of CICE, who is in charge of international students.

Food
- What was the food like?
Japanese food is delicious and unique. It can be carbohydrate-heavy, but also healthier when compared to the hamburgers and enchiladas here.

- Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?
The cafeteria at school served really good food, for about 400 yen each. The supermarket was only 3 minutes away from the international house (our dorm), so all of the UC students got the majority of their meals and ingredients there. The supermarket there also had various restaurants inside.

- How much was an average meal?
If you’re thrifty, you can find meals for 600-800 yen each. But on average, in restaurants, the lowest prices were about 1000-1300 yen each. Izakayas cost around 3000-4000 yen.

- What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?
It was about the same as a regular three-meal day in the U.S.

- Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?
If you are staunch about your diet, it’s relatively difficult to maintain a fully vegetarian diet. I am a vegetarian and had to ease my dietary restrictions because I felt like I was missing out on so much. Japan’s mainly a fish-eating country, but meat is becoming more popular than fish there. Produce and salads are not commonly eaten in Japan, and you’ll find that fruits and vegetables are expensive.

Travel/Safety
- If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?
To get to school, walking was preferred as it was relatively close. But the walk was also quite steep and takes around 40 minutes. Bussing was faster, but costs 210 yen per trip, which gets pricey after awhile and gets crowded during rush hours. The bus to school was specifically meant for that route to school, so you won’t get lost.

- Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?
I felt safe EVERYWHERE in Japan. Even when you encounter drunken people, or even in crowded trains, it was mainly okay. However, there is always safety in numbers and you should still always be alert.

- Describe the public transportation in your host country?
The ABSOLUTE BEST. Trains are the lifeline to exploring Japan adequately and fully.

- Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?
Absolutely not. If you wanted to go anywhere, you could do it by bus or train.

Host City/Country

- What was the weather like?
In the spring, it was mildly cold. Light jackets and pants would be good. After this initial period came the rainy season, which was obviously rainy. Rain boots and umbrellas are recommended, but not necessary (they can be too bulky to pack. I bought mine in Japan and gave them away later.) Towards the summer, the weather turned ludicrously humid. Walking outside alone will result in you being soaked in water and sweat. I recommend shorts, dresses, tank tops.

- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?
Totsuka is much like Riverside, except for the humidity. It’s near bigger cities but far enough to enjoy the quiet of suburbia. It’s a quaint town; plenty of restaurants, a fair amount of shopping, and a medium-sized train station. There’s also plenty of parks and nature for those who enjoy the more natural as opposed to urban.

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?
The best things you remember are with your friends that you did on a regular basis in your own home, so cheap karaoke and izakaya-ing were always quite delightful.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?
Totsuka’s nearest city was Yokohama, the second-largest city in Japan, and only 30 minutes out of Tokyo, the largest city in the world, so it was quite a major hub during rush hour. In both Yokohama and Tokyo, you could find plenty of American-brand restaurants and shopping. Often here, you can encounter English-speakers.

Culture

- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  - Time & punctuality
    Always be on time, especially for class. Punctuality is important in Japan. Professors who teach first period might be more lenient, but be sure not to make it a habit if you’re late.
  - Eye contact & staring
    My Caucasian friends often noticed that more attention was paid to them because they looked more conspicuous to Japanese people. It may get annoying, but it won’t usually turn into anything more than that.
  - Relationships
    Women in Japan generally wore heels, skirts, and other nice clothing. It depends on which part of the city or country you went to. Casual California wear was suitable for everyday wear for the most part, but Tokyo and Yokohama usually required a more sophisticated look than a t-shirt and old jeans.
- **Alcohol consumption**
  Alcohol is seen as a social activity, much more so than the U.S. The legal drinking age is 20. All-you-can-drink bars/restaurants are very common, and most clubs, organizations, or friends go there to socialize, drink, talk, eat, and sometimes karaoke.

- **What culture shock did you go through?**
  Because I am Asian, I was surprised when Japanese people recognized me as not another Japanese person. I was sometimes treated as a *gaijin*, which might be uncomfortable, but usually not threatening. Sometimes you may be treated as though you are on display as well, because of your foreigner status and because you come from California.

- **Other?**

**Banking**

- **Were credit cards widely accepted?**
  Visa and MasterCard.

- **Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
  Yes, and it was relatively easy because we went with a staff person for the international students office. If you receive a JASSO scholarship, you will have to open one, but someone will help you.

- **If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM?**
  **Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?**
  In the beginning, I relied on using ATMs at 7-11s (which are literally everywhere), and usually withdrew 50,000 yen (500 USD) at a time. I would recommend calling your bank prior to departure and ask what their rates are, which is what I did. That way, your bank is also aware of activity on your card overseas.

- **Were there ATMs on campus?**
  There are nearby convenience stores with ATMs everywhere.