



2023-2024

WATANABE SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

U.S.-Japan Council

Generously Supported by the Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship Fund

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Executive Summary

In 2023-2024, we are thrilled to have supported a total of 19 scholars (11 Japanese and 8 Americans) for the academic year, which is the scholarship's seventh cohort. The scholars' bio can be found online below.

[2023-2024 Watanabe Scholars - U.S.-Japan Council \(usjapancouncil.org\)](https://usjapancouncil.org)

The selection process for the Watanabe Scholarship 2023-2024 was very competitive, with many enthusiastic applicants, but we were able to select a wonderful scholarship cohort who will serve as a vital bridge between Japan and the United States in the future.

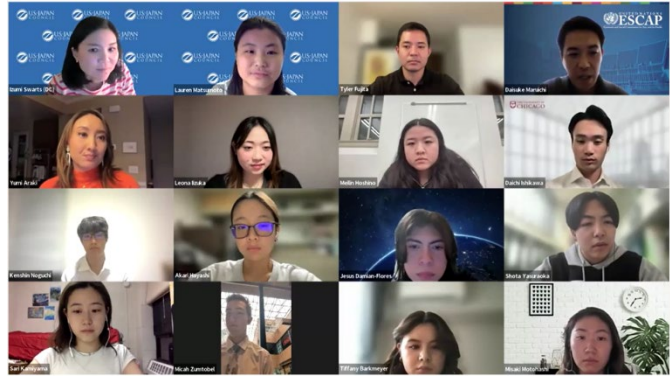
In promoting the 2023-2024 scholarship application, a total of three virtual info sessions were organized for American and Japanese students and administrators. It was clear from the information sessions that there was a lot of interest in this scholarship; since numerous students shared that there were limited scholarships and loans available to international degree-seeking students and graduate students. Additionally, some Japanese students shared their tight finance situation due to Japan's economic situation and were grateful to find out about the Watanabe Scholarship. Among other avenues, the Watanabe Scholarship was promoted through Japan Student Services Organization website and materials for U.S.-Japan exchanges.

In September 2023, our team member attended EducationUSA Tokyo, which is annual study abroad fair hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, to introduce Watanabe Scholarship to over 100 students and their guardians who had interests in learning about financial resources that can be applied toward their future study abroad in the United States.



From November 7 to 10, 2023, one selected Japanese scholar, Leona Iizuka, attended U.S.-Japan Council (USJC) Annual Conference that was held in Washington, DC. She shared her study abroad experiences, dreams, as well as her mentor and her stories, in front of over 600 audiences consisting of American and Japanese leaders. She interacted with the conference attendees, TOMODACHI participants, USJC members, and USJC staff to build her network.

On February 24, 2024, Watanabe Scholars attended a virtual Leadership Training Session. This session welcomed Daisuke Maruichi (Economic Affairs Officer at the United Nations in Bangkok, Thailand, Watanabe Scholar 2017-2018), Yumi Araki (Managing Producer of Podcasts at America's Test Kitchen, 2023 Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) Cohort), and Tyler Fujita (Assistant Director of the Wo International Center at Punahou School, and 2021 ELP Cohort) who shared their respective professional career journeys. Although they were from different fields with different backgrounds, all topics they touched on were of strong interest to the scholars: including their dreams, unpredictable paths that were opened up from setbacks, and a strong will to succeed. Their experiences encouraged the Watanabe Scholars to move forward and make the most use of their study abroad experiences.



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We are grateful to the Toshizo Watanabe Foundation for the generous endowment gift that makes this scholarship possible. There has been a tremendous and positive response to the scholarship by both Japanese and American students who plan to study abroad. We would also like to thank Mr. Watanabe for making the time to read letters from the Scholars. We look forward to the continued success of the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship Program. We hope you enjoy this report and thank you once again.

Sincerely,

Izumi Swartz
Program Manager

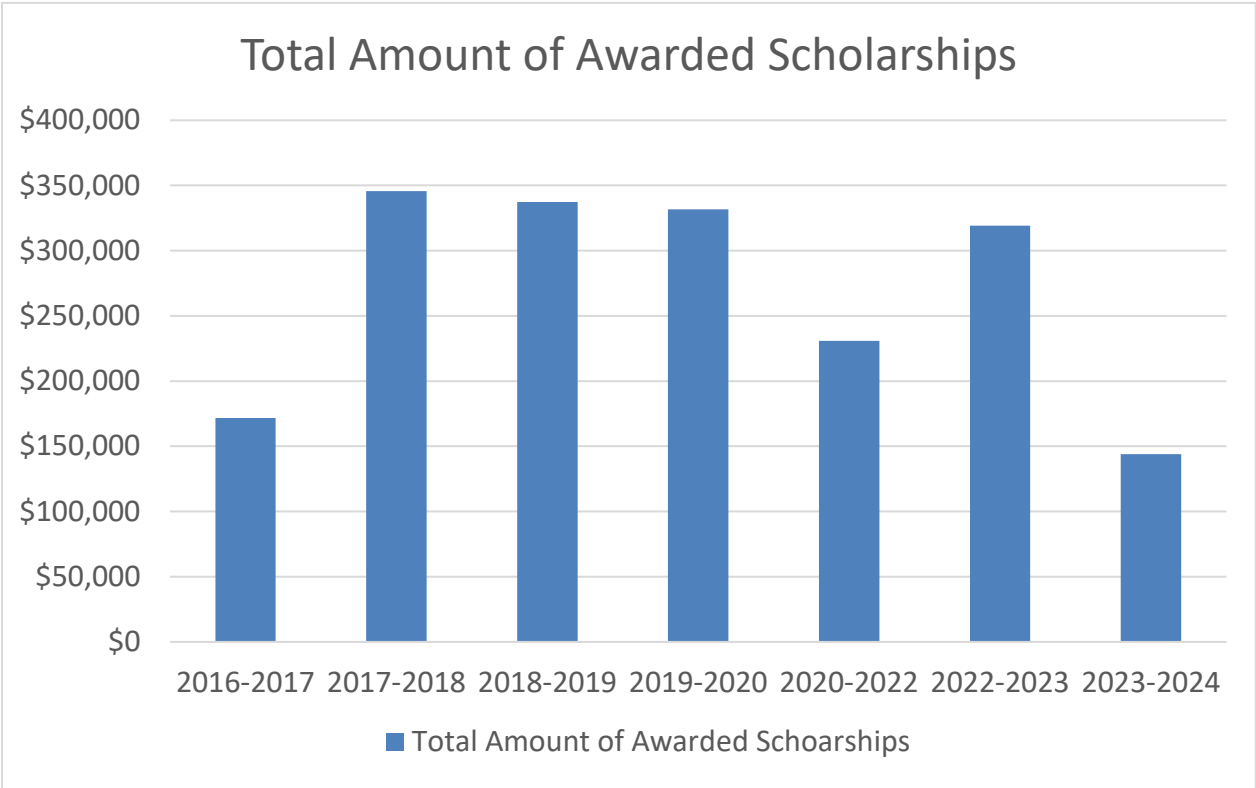
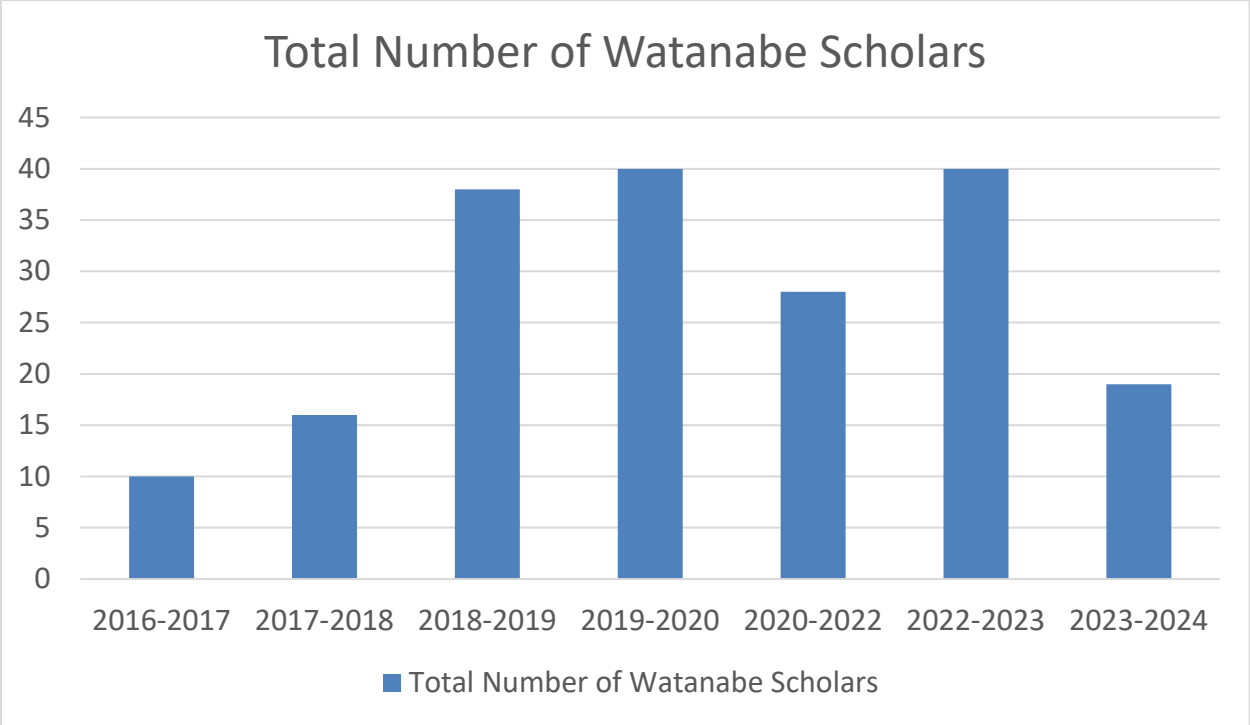
About the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship Program

The Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship Fund provides financial assistance to undergraduate and graduate students for a semester or year-long study abroad program in either the United States or Japan. A generous endowment gift of \$10 million from Mr. Toshizo (Tom) Watanabe to USJC makes it possible to award scholarships to Japanese and American students with leadership potential for whom study abroad would not be possible without financial support. The scholarship program grants awards to recipients in amounts determined by financial need and other qualifications. For the inaugural program years of 2016-2018, the scholarship supported Japanese undergraduate students who studied in the United States. Beginning in the 2018-2019 academic year, the scholarship also supports American students studying in Japan.

USJC will recruit, select, and support scholarship recipients, welcoming them to the TOMODACHI Generation as future leaders and contributors to the U.S.-Japan relationship. For more information, please see: <https://www.usjapanCouncil.org/watanabe-scholarship/>.



Scholarship Statistics



2023-2024 Watanabe Scholars' School List

Japanese Scholars Studied at...

- American University
- Denison University
- DePauw University
- Grinnell College
- The University of Chicago
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of California, San Diego
- University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Vanderbilt University

Their Home Schools included...

- American University
 - Brandeis University
 - Denison University
 - DePauw University
 - International Christian University
 - Sapporo Shinyo High School
 - University of California, Berkeley
 - University of California, San Diego
 - Waseda University
 - Whitney M. Young Magnet High School
-

American Scholars Studied at...

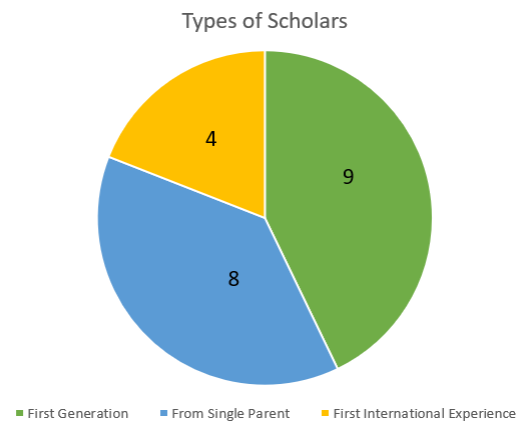
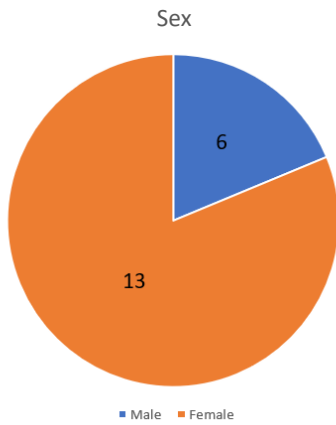
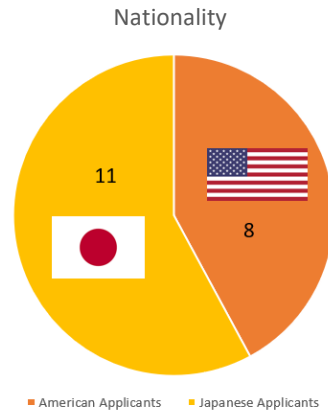
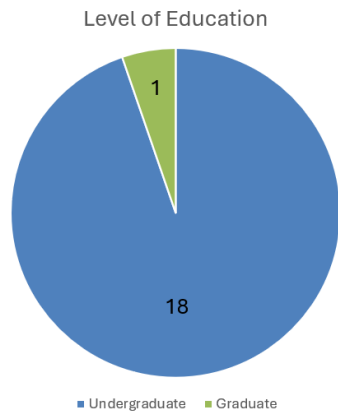
- Kansai Gaidai University
- Kwansai Gakuin University
- Rikkyo University
- Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University
- Shibaura Institute of Technology
- Temple University, Japan Campus
- Tokyo International University
- University of California, San Diego
- Waseda University

Their Home Schools included...

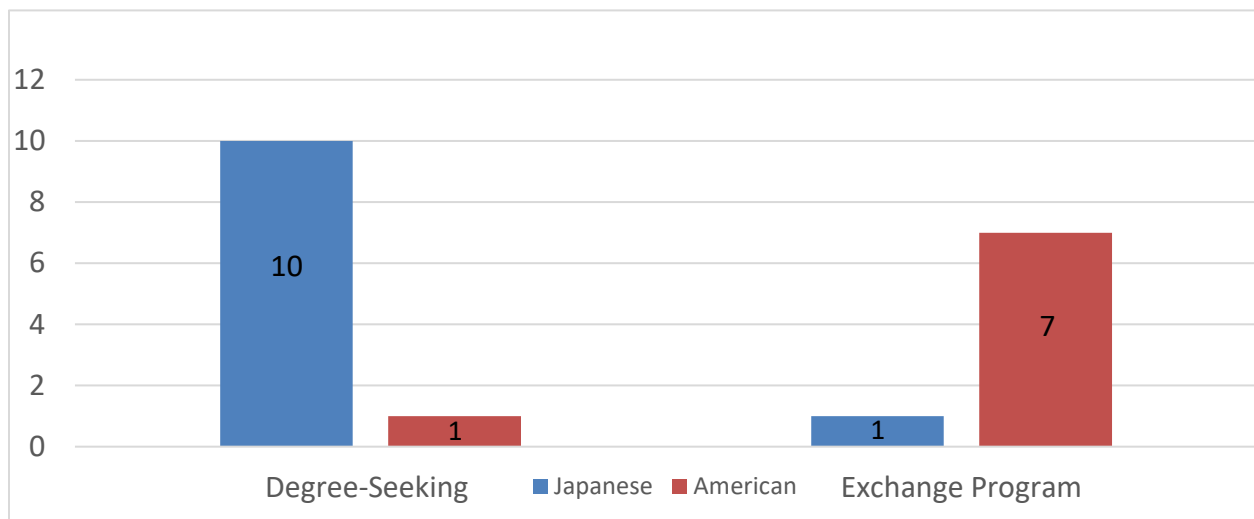
(For those on exchange programs)

- College of San Mateo
- Colorado School of Mines
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Paint Branch High School
- St. Edward's University
- University of Toledo
- University of California, Davis
- Willamette University

2023-2024 Scholars At-A-Glance



Types of International Studies Programs



Watanabe Scholars Highlights



Akari Hayashi

Denison University (Degree-Seeking)

First of all, I hugely appreciate the financial support from the Watanabe Scholarship. Without the support from the Watanabe Scholarship, I could not have completed the first year at Denison University and have made the experience there special.

Academically, my view regarding education has expanded since I began to study abroad. I originally decided to go to college because I wanted to ponder what shapes “youth's desperation” from the perspective not only inside the classroom but also outside of the classroom.

My future plan is to address summer research regarding “undocumented students” (note it does not refer to typical meaning, undocumented “immigrant” students) in educational studies by employing qualitative narrative research. In my high school, there are “undocumented students” who feel desperation for educational experiences, and they cannot be unraveled by generalized causes and cannot be explained by explicit language to make everyone understand easily, unlike “documented students” who are statistically defined as “inaccessible to education because of race, socioeconomic status, or disability.” I always find it difficult to explain the undocumented students to others who have not met the undocumented students. Therefore, I am planning my summer research theme to tell the true state of undocumented students without any intention of researchers such as “they should be” by employing qualitative narrative research.

Being a Watanabe Scholar is an important factor in shaping my present and future because it helps me to encounter Japanese students who study abroad in the United States. Not only my friends who are international students at college from various countries, I love meeting but also Japanese people studying abroad in the United States. They have their own unique experiences and perspectives in making the decision to study abroad and are pursuing their own curiosity with various twists and turns. I truly cherish the time when I can learn about them through dialogue, when I have a chance to connect their interests with my interests, and when I get excited about the possibility of collaborating with them in the future. Watanabe Scholar makes it possible for me to do it, such a way of managing the Watanabe Scholar Instagram account. I hope to continue to be involved in the management of Instagram, and contribute to establishing a stronger community of Watanabe Scholars next year.

Lastly, I would like to appreciate the great opportunities and international experiences supported by the Watanabe Scholarship. I am also very happy to be a Watanabe Scholar again next year. I am looking forward to exploring my academic journey at Denison University and also meeting next year's Watanabe Scholars, having a dialogue with them, and finding out their future possibilities.



Charmaine Agustin
Waseda University (Exchange Program)

There were many classes at Waseda University that are not offered at UC Davis such as my Anime: Art and Industry class where I watched different anime every week to analyze and discuss with the rest of the class and my Life Story Interview class where I had to interview multiple people on their entire lives to understand how they became the person they are today. By living in Japan again after so long, I realized that my heart has always been in Japan. Since my heart is in Japan, my future home will also be in Japan.

Compared to many of my study abroad peers, I actually did not have many unexpected happenings as I had grown up in Japan for 8-9 years from elementary school and was already familiar with the culture, the people, and the food. However, if there is anything that I have learned from my personal experiences traveling around Japan, it is that the 'Tokyo people are cold' myth is true. During winter break and spring break, I took the opportunity to travel by myself around Japan. For the former, I visited Miyagi Prefecture's Sendai and infamous onsen town Zao for 2 weeks. Unfortunately, I was sick for half of it (not COVID thankfully) with a cold, and I was curled up under a kotatsu having a Harry Potter marathon with my online friends for Christmas and did BBQ by myself for New Years.

As much as I enjoyed my time abroad and made my dream come true going to school in Japan, I still had my own tribulations and struggled with my mental health living by myself in an apartment 50 minutes from campus and my friends. I spiraled into a deep depression over my regrets and worry, and it was affecting me so much to the point that I struggled to get out of bed to go to class. As a result, if I were to personally talk one-on-one with future Watanabe scholars, I would remind them gently to always prioritize themselves. Another big lesson I would like to pass on is to remain open-minded when it comes to the education system.

I would encourage other American students to make Japanese friends or talk to alumni to figure out what professors to avoid and the funnest classes that aren't available at their home university. Moreover, I would give them advice on the circle life of Japanese university culture and the reality of networking.

Lastly and most importantly, I will be applying for Waseda University's Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies since I would like to pursue higher education surrounding the stigmatization of mental health and learning how to better allocate mental health resources for children in the rural areas of Japan. Although living in Tokyo by myself was admittedly overwhelming because of my anxiety, I am very grateful to have gotten the opportunity to study abroad that I waited for 2 years with the support of the Watanabe Scholarship.



Daichi Ishikawa
The University of Chicago (Degree-Seeking)

Over the course of three quarters, I have taken a wide range of courses related to data science, including statistics, data engineering, machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and large language models (LLMs). While the knowledge I gained in these specialized fields was substantial, this report will focus on the broader, high-level insights and the differences between Japan and the U.S. that I observed.

Beyond academics, I learned a great deal from interactions with friends and peers. One significant realization was the diversity of life paths. My program included students who had come directly from undergraduate studies in the U.S., those who had worked in India before returning to academia, and even individuals over 40 who were studying out of personal interest. This diversity inspired me to reassess my own goals and aspirations without being constrained by my past experiences or societal expectations. In Japan, there is often a strong emphasis on attending prestigious universities and working for reputable companies, but this can sometimes lead to unfulfilling career choices. Studying abroad helped me break free from these preconceived notions and focus on what I truly want to achieve.

After completing my summer internship, I will graduate in December following the Fall quarter. My goal is to leverage my knowledge and skills in AI to make a positive impact on society. Initially, I plan to gain experience in the U.S., where I can work with advanced technologies and a diverse pool of talented people, and eventually use that experience to start a business that benefits Japan.

I believe that Japan faces a challenge in the slower adoption of new technologies compared to the U.S. Additionally, there are instances where excellent technologies developed in Japan struggle to expand internationally due to cultural and communication barriers. By combining my hard skills in data science and AI with my soft skills in English and cross-cultural understanding, I aim to bridge the gap between Japan and the U.S., facilitating better technological and cultural exchange.

I encourage future scholars to actively seek out and embrace various opportunities. While it is possible to passively participate in classes, taking a proactive approach will significantly enrich your study abroad experience. Attend parties, invite friends to events, and broaden your social circle. Although it may be intimidating at first, most people are welcoming and eager to engage with you. Participating in local talk events and hackathons in Chicago helped me make valuable connections and have a meaningful year. For those concerned about their English skills, remember that there are many tools available, and kind friends who will support you, so don't let language barriers hold you back. Embrace an adventurous mindset and make the most of your time abroad!



Elise Fashimpaur

Tokyo International University (Exchange Program)

Academically, the international campus mostly catered to the E-Track (English-based classrooms) majors and their students, although there were a handful of Japanese students taking their English Communications classes there. Thus, a large percentage of the peers one interacted with daily were from countless countries and nationalities, creating a friendly and diverse atmosphere in which to learn. Most of the classes offered in the E-Track were related to business and politics (neither of which are things I study), but I was able to find courses in Japanese literature. Above all, I found my intensive language course to be extremely satisfying in making me feel like I was growing as a student.

After studying abroad in Japan, I am a much more flexible person. While I certainly still like an itinerary, after having so many things change from my originally planned schedules, I have become accustomed to making decisions quickly and adapting. Sometimes this meant taking a different train route, which allowed me to learn the directions of cities more easily. Sometimes this meant reorienting my brain when I took a wrong turn on a street, which allowed me to practice my spatial memory.

I am particularly grateful that I was able to meet up with some former ASP students that I had met at my home university. Even though I was not able to interact in Japanese much in the school environment, forcing my introverted self to invite them out to activities meant that I was able to do shopping trips, go to Tokyo Disney Sea and more – all the while speaking colloquial Japanese. It is always an honor to be so greatly helped by good-natured peers, and I was glad that I was fortunate enough to be helped by the same students that I tutored back in America. It also allowed me to see more of Japan than I would have if I had been alone, including the modern social culture that one can only see by interacting with your peer counterparts.

As I think about my experience in Japan as a whole, I see it for what it truly was – an experience. Before going to Japan, I was too excited. I had been studying the language for nearly a decade and had it set in my heart that this trip that I was fortunate enough to be afforded needed to justify all the time I spent learning the language. But no country and no study abroad can live up to that type of expectation. By taking a step back and letting myself just enjoy the time I had in Japan – setting aside weekend dates when I would take a daytrip or making myself do social activities to practice Japanese – really made the experience what it was. And because of that, studying abroad was worth every moment.



Jeremy Vargas Rodriguez
Kwansei Gakuin University (Exchange Program)

First, my mental health and self awareness has increased significantly since coming abroad. You learn so much about yourself when you are in an unfamiliar environment. You learn how to take care of yourself, how to entertain yourself, and most importantly how to heal yourself. By jumping into the unknown you are put up against many obstacles and often uncomfortable situations. However, through this you learn so much about yourself. I learned more about myself in the last nine months than I have in 20 years living in America.

Academically, I think my productivity has increased 10 fold! Which is crazy to say since I have always been a very productive student. Learning Japanese in Japanese is hard and I oftendon't understand anything. However, there are so many resources around you that make learning fun. There are so many fun ways to learn Japanese whilst studying abroad; whether it's through friends, media, or books. You are sure to find something that will help you learn.

Studying abroad was a wonderful experience. I'm grateful for all the support that I have received in order to study abroad. I wish everyone could study abroad as it broadens your connections and perspectives of the world. When you study abroad there are so many unexpected things that you will encounter. One thing that I've encountered is the use of bathroom slippers. It's pretty well known that in Japanese culture you take your shoes off at the door and use indoor slippers. What I didn't know is that Japanese families have a completely different set of slippers for using the bathroom! It was such a random concept to me but the most I thought about it, the more it just makes sense. If I had to name one experience that I least expected to happen, it would have to be the time a taxi driver drove a group of my friends and I around during our trip and would wait outside until we were ready to move to the next location; the driver would even pause the tab until we started moving again.

Watanabe Scholars or those who are considering studying abroad. Examples include; One piece of advice is to just go. Just go abroad and find out for yourself what it's like. We all have the same feeling before our study abroad, "should I go", "Maybe it's not for me", etc... but actually, you'll never know until you go abroad! My biggest suggestion is to PACK LIGHT. I'm talking about two shirts, two pants, and a few other things. You might be thinking that you need more clothes. However, the clothes in the country you will be studying are made to fit that environment, so it's better to buy clothes once you are abroad.



Jose de Jesús Damián-Flores
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Exchange Program)

The chance to study abroad has helped to develop myself not only academically, but also personally. Thanks to this experience I have been able to cultivate and acquire new personal and political perspectives. To be quite honest, I have also changed in some ways as well. My interests have become much more profound.

I want to note that I almost lost interest in Japanese during my junior year of high school, however after receiving support from my high school Japanese teacher and by playing these games my interest in the language and culture was reignited. Taking Japanese as a language was a very spur of the moment decision for me since I wanted to quit French. I actually changed classes the weekend before school started after I ran into my vice principal after band camp.

This small spur of the moment decision has completely altered the course of my life. In Fukuoka I visited the Marine World Aquariums, went to several different museums, had authentic Mexican food, visited Fukuoka Tower, etc.

In Osaka I went to places such as Dotonbori, Kaiyukan, Umeda, Osaka Castle, etc. In Tokyo I actually visited one of my best friends from high school. Her and I actually took Japanese together. Here I was able to visit places such as Shinjuku Gyoen, Aoyama Gakuin, Shibuya, Kabukicho, etc. I also had really good Indonesian and Mexican food in Tokyo. What stuck out to me the most were the vibes in these cities. Tokyo felt a lot more rigid and cold compared to Osaka. To be honest, Osaka was probably my favorite city. It felt a lot more laid back and friendly compared to Tokyo. I was also able to see Daoko's 10th anniversary 4 concert in Osaka, which was incredibly fun to see. Fukuoka was also very fun since I was able to see Band-Maid's 10th anniversary tour as well. Fukuoka felt like a middle ground between Osaka and Tokyo. Honestly, one of the reasons I like Osaka is because it was the first time I had ever actually had a trip to a different city for fun. In the end my experiences here have led to me exploring learning not just one, but two languages. I have learned from a variety of different teachers with a variety of different perspectives. I have made friends from a variety of countries. I have seen different Japanese cities.

I have had so many experiences not just from Japanese people and from living here, but also with people with whose culture I was wholly unfamiliar with. My experiences with these people and places will forever occupy a special spot in my heart. In the future, I plan on seeking an internship in Austin.

I also would hopefully like to return to Japan and go to Indonesia to see my friends. I am also considering returning to APU to do my masters here. Ideally I would like to become a foreign service officer. To end this, I would like to say that I am very happy to thank the USJC and Mr. Toshizo Watanabe for granting me this opportunity.



Kenshin Noguchi
DePauw University (Degree-Seeking)

I have transformed from a student who simply aimed to meet academic requirements to a passionate learner. Initially, the academic rigor and pressure to perform well in courses drove the need to excel in exams and assignments rather than fostering a genuine love for learning.

Therefore, my approach to learning was somewhat mechanical and while it seemed effective for achieving high scores, it left me with a superficial understanding of the material. However, as I progressed through my studies, there was a sociology course, Contemporary Society, that helped me to realize a deep appreciation for knowledge. This course delved into the social interaction between society and individuals, and it challenged me to question the assumptions about societal issues. It also made me consider issues from multiple viewpoints which fostered a nuanced understanding.

And then I began to recognize the value of intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. I was able to make a shift in my mindset and it has made me become more proactive in seeking knowledge, asking questions, and exploring beyond the curriculum. I now approach my studies with a genuine desire to grow and I found myself to be excited about discovering new concepts. In addition to becoming a more dedicated student, I developed valuable skills that have helped me.

I would also advise those who are studying abroad to not forget to have fun. While it is important to take studies seriously and submit assignments accordingly, sometimes the pressures prevent us from enjoying the study abroad experience. When you are overwhelmed with studies, it can cause an academic burnout where you will feel even more exhaustion and a complete lack of motivation. I have experienced this several times, therefore, I can confidently say, complete work efficiently, but also give yourself time to recuperate by doing activities you enjoy.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Toshizo Watanabe Foundation and the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship team for their generosity. The financial burden was considerably one of the most problematic barriers I faced as a degree-seeking student. However, being selected as a Watanabe Scholar lessened the worries of the struggle and I have been able to put my focus on my studies more. My confidence also grew as I was able to explore my passion which has led to many new opportunities this upcoming academic year. I have undergone many significant changes, both academic and personally, and I have been able to accomplish goals as well as create new goals as my ambitions grows. It was a honor to be a Watanabe Scholar as I made further developments in my goal of becoming a global leader I aspire to be in the future, and I hope to learn even more about what it takes to become a leader. So again, I am extremely grateful for this scholarship because these transformative experiences would not have been possible without their support.



Leona Iizuka
Vanderbilt University (Degree-Seeking)

Studying in the United States has been a transformative experience for me, and this past year marked a significant milestone in my academic, professional, and personal journey.

My biggest achievement from last year was being elected as a panelist at the USJC Annual Conference in Washington, DC, where I received the TOMODACHI Global Speaker Award 2023. Being a Watanabe Scholar has opened many doors for me in unimaginable ways, but sharing my personal story and representing Watanabe Scholars at this conference is an achievement I am very proud of and forever grateful for.

I grew up with a single mother, and this part of my upbringing was almost never shared outside of my close friends, let alone in a professional setting. In Japan, being a woman often unfortunately means facing societal drawbacks, and being a “single mother” connotes a lack of opportunities and disadvantage. At first, I was surprised that I was given an opportunity to share this personal story with hundreds of people at a professional conference. After the panel, I received many heartwarming comments and encouragement, which reassured me about my decision to speak at this conference. Furthermore, through this conference, I connected with many professionals working in different industries. I learned networking and business communication skills, which I carried with me to school and beyond in the following semester. I was impressed by the work of the leaders who attended this event and appreciated connecting with them in person.

I recommend that anyone planning to study abroad or anyone already abroad take full advantage of the resources available. The importance of seeking advice and help is sometimes neglected in Japan, but I learned how far this small act of asking could take you.

As someone passionate about international experience and business between Japan and the US, I pitched my interest in contributing to the future relationships between Japan and the US and connected it to the skills I learned through studying Economics.

I believe my experiences getting involved in activities showcasing my interests in this regard served as a differentiator from other students.

Currently, I am working at PricewaterhouseCoopers under an Auditing/Assurance practice in Detroit, Michigan. In this role, I help inbound Japanese business services with their auditing process and gain insights from businesses in both countries. It is my honor to utilize my understanding of Japanese culture, business practices, and courtesy. My immediate plan is to go abroad to Copenhagen this fall semester. I never imagined that I would study outside the US in my undergraduate career, and I am very grateful for this opportunity and everyone who worked to make it possible. The Watanabe Scholarship and the team have supported me for the past three years of my studying abroad experience and helped pave the path forward for me to continue studying.



Meilin Hoshino
Grinnell College (Degree-Seeking)

Studying abroad in the U.S. this year has been an incredible experience for me. I have grown both academically and personally in many ways. Academically, I have had to challenge myself, whether it was working on class assignments or studying for a test. I have come to understand that getting straight A's is not always possible, and that is alright if I work hard and do my best. Personally, I have not only learned what it is like to live independently as an adult, but I also created new friendships and learned more about myself. I have found new passions, such as biking, weightlifting, gardening, and being in contact with nature more. I also got to learn more about different cultures and share my culture with others. Although I was not expecting to find so many things to do in rural Iowa, I have found an amazing community here, and I am very happy with my decision to study abroad at Grinnell College.

Although I have been at Grinnell College for only one year, I have truly enjoyed my experience studying abroad. Living in rural Iowa has been especially unique for someone like me who has grown up in big cities. I have come to appreciate learning more about the agriculture and farm life of rural Iowa, as well as how climate change has been and will greatly affect production in Iowa and around the world. I have also really enjoyed getting to know the community in town better by volunteering at the giving gardens and at various town events. The countless friends I have made this year have also been a very special part of my life here at Grinnell. The friends I made during the International Pre-Orientation Program (IPOP) have been especially close to my heart, and I have really enjoyed learning more about different cultures such as those of Bulgaria, Kosovo, Bangladesh, Jordan, and more.

I am truly grateful to the USJC Watanabe Scholarship for supporting me with their generous scholarship, which made it possible for me to have this wonderful experience studying abroad. Without their help, this opportunity would not have been possible. I hope to one day assist other students in the same way the Watanabe Scholarship has helped me. By helping each other, one step at a time, I believe we can make a significant impact in the world.

One piece of advice I would like to give to future scholars is to make sure to take advantage of all the resources and opportunities your school has to offer. Every university has a variety of opportunities and resources, and it is just a matter of looking out for them and doing a bit of research. In addition, I would like to tell future Watanabe Scholars to make sure to enjoy their time studying abroad. A year, or even four years, will pass by really quickly, so make sure to make the most of it. Studying and working hard in academics is extremely important, but it is equally important to have fun with friends, go to school-sponsored events, get to know other people, try new things, and find new hobbies. Your time studying abroad will be amazing, so don't be scared to try new things and have fun! Explore what the world has to offer!



Micah Zumtobel
Shibaura Institute of Technology (Exchange Program)

Studying in Japan has changed me. It has taught me many things I didn't know about myself. It has clarified my values, shown me where I was previously misguided, and given me a vision for how I want to live my life.

I began to settle into the rhythm of daily living in Japan. Right away, I joined the church choir at the Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Chiyoda (aka Nikolai-do), an Orthodox Christian church. I went at it with gung-ho: learning the melodies, learning how to read and chant quickly in Meiji-era Japanese, and learning all the pieces sung regularly on Sundays.

Here is a collection of advice I would give American students if they study abroad. At the top of the list is

1) Talk to your friends and family, especially until you get firm social footing in your country abroad. Life abroad, especially in a big city like Tokyo, can be isolating. It is not a sign of weakness that you can't make enough friends to fulfill your emotional and social needs instantly upon arrival. These things take time. Keep putting yourself out there, even if it is difficult and uncomfortable, and you will not regret it.

2) Study Japanese before you come, but don't sweat not being perfect. I am so glad I studied Japanese for nearly three years before I stepped foot in Japan. It has allowed me to have an infinitely richer experience than if I stayed in a 'foreigner bubble', and the daily challenge of communicating in Japanese has made me grow so much. But also, don't beat yourself up for struggling in Japanese conversation. Especially don't let your embarrassment at your Japanese level stop you from making Japanese friends anyway. Many will be turned away by it, but some will accept you just at the level you are.

3) Make friends through shared hobbies, not through talking. Your mileage may vary, but I found making friends in class nearly impossible. This is because the regular social interactions you may have with classmates rely on jokes, casual conversation, discussing homework, and other forms of verbal communication. You will not be as proficient in Japanese as in your native tongue at verbal communication for a long time. You're like a child trying to enter a conversation between adults. But you can offer plenty if you're doing something. So instead, seek out clubs or other extracurriculars.

I am so incredibly grateful to the Watanabe Foundation for making my life in Japan possible. I have gained experiences that I will carry with me for the rest of my life that I never would have experienced if I stayed in America. I will be better equipped to advise other students who want to travel abroad, teach my friends who want to learn about Japanese language and culture, and uplift those around me. I am confident that my growth in Japan will continue to have positive consequences that reverberate into every area of my life.



Misaki Motohashi

University of California, Berkeley (Degree-Seeking)

My study abroad journey at the University of California, Berkeley, has been nothing short of transformative. Drawn to Berkeley for its unparalleled proximity to San Francisco and Silicon Valley, I sought to immerse myself in the heart of tech entrepreneurship.

Embarking on this international study has been a defining chapter in my life. Personally, it pushed me to embrace new challenges and broaden my horizons. Academically, Berkeley's cutting-edge Data Science department provided me with a robust foundation in Statistics and Data Science, equipping me with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. I evolved into a more independent and resilient individual. The initial cultural differences—from food to living conditions and classroom dynamics—were hurdles that, once overcome, enriched my experience. Immersing myself in the local culture and academic environment, I gained confidence and a new perspective on the world.

Studying in the U.S. as an international student presented its own set of challenges. The cultural differences were initially daunting, but they gradually became a source of enrichment. I learned to navigate and appreciate these differences, adapting to a new way of life and study. One of the unexpected challenges was encountering a significant homeless population in Berkeley. The streets often felt unsafe, with frequent incidents of theft and the constant presence of homeless individuals. Additionally, witnessing the Palestinian protests on campus, which disrupted daily activities and even graduation ceremonies, was a stark reminder of the complex social dynamics in the U.S. These experiences broadened my understanding of societal issues and resilience.

I am eager to share my study abroad journey with peers back home to inspire them to seize similar opportunities. This experience has been life-changing, fundamentally shifting my perspective and mindset. Through sharing my story, I hope to encourage others to embark on their own international studies and embrace the transformative power of such experiences.

To the next cohort of Watanabe Scholars and those contemplating studying abroad, I offer this advice:-
Preparation: Be proactive in your preparations. Research the culture, language, and academic environment to ease your transition.

Being a Watanabe Scholar has been an incredible honor. It meant representing Japan in the United States and receiving invaluable support from Mr. Watanabe Toshiko. This scholarship enabled my educational journey, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunities it has provided. In conclusion, my time at Berkeley has been an adventurous and enriching journey. It has equipped me with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to pursue my goals and contribute positively to society. I look forward to sharing my experiences and inspiring future scholars to embark on their own transformative journeys.



Nao Aizaiwa
Denison University (Degree-Seeking)

The semester began with a significant setback. Due to miscommunication between the international student office and housing, I couldn't move in on the day I flew back to the US. My school has a strict policy against allowing students to move in before their designated time slot, so I found myself without a place to stay for the night. Fortunately, one of my co-workers from my Global Ambassador job had already moved into his senior apartment with his roommates for an on-campus summer job.

They kindly offered me their couch for the night. I was acquainted with all four roommates and enjoyed their company that evening. This unexpected situation brought us closer, and I ended up spending much of the semester studying, eating, playing, and even sleeping in their apartment. By the end of the semester, I was their unofficial fifth roommate. I had never made friends with whom I felt so comfortable until this semester, and it was because of them that I could survive the most challenging event that had happened during my college life

Academically, next semester will be the most challenging due to senior research for both of my majors. My goal is to balance academics and personal life by leading a healthy lifestyle. Since I got into cooking last year, I plan to cook for and with my roommates, sharing Japanese cuisine and culture with my American roommates.

Additionally, the Boston Career Forum is happening in November, and I plan to attend for my post-graduate career. In terms of activities, my roommates and I are planning to enjoy all events, including the big Gala, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and more. My goal next year is to do everything I can to have no regrets when I graduate in May.

To all new scholars and international students studying abroad, I want to say that studying abroad is not just about the experience itself but how you spend your time there. Instead of staying in your comfort zone, try to explore new worlds. Do everything you are interested in. Studying abroad in college is a privilege, and it is our responsibility to learn and share our experiences. As students, there is no failure; even failure is a story of success. With that in mind, the most important piece of advice is not to overwork yourself to the point where your mental health suffers. Many of my friends had to take a gap semester, gap year, or medical leave due to stress from trying to balance everything. While it is important to try different things, time management and pacing yourself are key to having a fulfilling college life.



Katsura Nodoka

American University (Degree-Seeking)

My time in Washington, D.C. has undoubtedly been the most challenging, enjoyable, and growth-filled period of my life. Despite the numerous difficulties, I feel fortunate to have thrived in a high-level environment where I could grow alongside ambitious peers. Through the past two years in the U.S., I have developed a strong belief that, regardless of the situation, I can turn adversity into an opportunity to achieve the best possible outcome.

Initially, it was very challenging to maintain high grades while learning in a non-native language. Realizing that my previous study methods from Japanese university were no longer effective, I established a new approach. I organized my peers through group chats in all my courses, which not only contributed to my improvement but also benefited my classmates.

One crucial piece of advice I received from my professor was the importance of communication with professors in Western education. This led me to set a personal rule to speak up at least three times during class and to frequently use professors' office hours. Thanks to these approaches, I had an honor to be selected in the dean's list which celebrates top academic students. I also focused on internship activities. I participated in an internship at the Tokyo Broadcasting Systems, Inc. Washington Bureau. This year, with the presidential election, I was involved in creating news packages of presidential election.

I believe it is crucial to knock on every door. Through my internships in Washington, D.C., I found joy in the media industry and decided to pursue a career in this field after graduation. This summer, I am interning at the CNN Tokyo Bureau. I am thrilled to share news about Japan with a global audience and feel the joy of having my articles read by people worldwide.

I did the presentation about my study abroad at my university. I am currently a finalist in a contest at my university called the pheasant contest. So, I am thinking to share my experiences in the US to motivate other people to go to study abroad.

Being a Watanabe scholar has provided me with countless invaluable experiences. Before receiving this scholarship, I was occupied with part-time jobs even while studying abroad. However, after receiving the scholarship, I was able to participate in internships where I discovered the excitement of international reporting and developed a dream to pursue a career as a journalist. This experience has also strengthened my desire to contribute to Japan in the future. I aim to connect Japan and the U.S. through information.

My study abroad experience in Washington, D.C. has been transformative. It has not only enhanced my academic and professional skills but also shaped my career aspirations. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities I have had and look forward to contributing to the field of journalism, bridging gaps, and fostering understanding between Japan and the U.S.



Phoebe Buggy
Kansai Gaidai University (Exchange Program)

During my first semester in Japan, I was very active, I made some good friends with other people in my program and was super excited to go around and see Tokyo which was a city I knew from TV so I was very, touristy for the first bit of my time here.

One of my friends from America had actually gotten an internship for around three months in Japan and was in her last month when I arrived, so we decided to go around and see some stuff in Tokyo while we were both there.

My time in Japan wasn't all good, I was getting sick often across my time in Japan which made it really difficult to learn and it was extremely irritating. I could not figure out what was doing it and went to the doctor frequently for it, eventually, I decided to do an allergy test and learned that I was in fact, allergic/intolerant of very common types of seafood. This was super disheartening for very believable reasons.

That is one of my biggest pieces of advice for future Watanabe scholars, join a circle, experience the culture, meet new people, and experience the variety of world cultures. Meeting real people in the context that they live in teaches you more than I can emphasize.

So I highly suggest seeking out groups for whatever hobby or just something you enjoy and engaging with them. It'll teach you real Japanese and really help with homesickness, being social makes the experience a lot better. During my first semester, I had a lot of friends and was very social, however, most of the people I knew were there for only one semester and so when my spring semester came around I had to remake most of my friends. Which I will admit, was pretty tiring.

So I highly suggest looking specifically for more Japanese friends, while being able to speak in English easily is nice, it is better to prioritize relationships with people who live in the country. The commonality of the International student experience is meaningful, but it isn't what a scholar is there for.

I have one more year left in college after this year abroad and afterwards, I'm hoping to join the United States Diplomatic Service to do embassy work in Japan. I fell in love with Japan and Tokyo specifically during my time here. The Watanabe program provided a plethora of opportunities to me while I was here and I will always be thankful for the experience and opportunities I received from the program. Japan has a history to it that feels weighty while showing off a vision for the future, I loved the history and connection with the past that permeated Kyoto when I visited and I was dazzled by the diversity shown off in Tokyo while I lived there. The many aspects of Japanese culture I was able to experience and see during my time here really meant a lot to me and reinforced values I cherished while giving me the experience to deepen my own worldview through the perspectives shown through cultural contact.



Rina Matsuo

University of California, San Diego (Degree-Seeking)

Academically, I started taking upper division classes, which made me study more specialized area. Along with that, the assignments became more and more difficult, and I could no longer solve them by myself.

Then, I decided to utilize the education provided in my college, which was asking questions to teaching assistants (TAs). Not all TAs gave me the right answers to my questions, and some just wrote down the answers to the assignments given by the professors. However, the TAs in the classes I often brought questions to even prepared the exercises I needed based on my questions, which was very helpful.

Overall, I have been able to interact with, help, and make a difference in the lives of many people during my time at UCSD. I consider this experience more valuable than any possession I have ever owned. Not only did I enhanced my network, but I realized the deep connections we made because we worked so hard to engage each other.

Personally, the Watanabe Scholars Virtual Program has had a great impact on me. The young students who are active in their generation gave me energy and new motivation for the future. Especially, in the leadership development program, I heard about their reasons for studying abroad, what they have accomplished so far, and what they see for the future. This gave me a lot more things to learn and to put into practice on my own. I consider it an asset for me to have been awarded a scholarship as a Watanabe Scholars and to have been able to associate with so many outstanding Watanabe Scholars.

What I would like the next generation of Watanabe Scholars to remember is: “Never underestimate your potential.” First of all, just by being selected as a Watanabe Scholars, you are carrying the hopes and expectations of many people. And I want you to know that in addition to your motivation to learn in a new place, you have your own accumulated efforts and extracurricular activities.

When you share them with other Watanabe Scholars, I believe that you will look up to Scholars who are working in different fields than you. Sometimes this may lead to jealousy, wondering why I am not able to do as well as they do. But then you will remember that you are Watanabe Scholars, and you will challenge yourself and aim higher. Your potential is not as low as you think.



Sabrina Williams
Kansai Gaidai University (Exchange Program)

Firstly I would like to say that I am very grateful to have been awarded this scholarship. Studying abroad in Japan has been one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Studying in Japan was honestly not that different from studying in the US. The only major difference at Kansai Gaidai was the fact that they have two campuses; Gotenyama and Nakamiya. I had to walk 15 minutes to class everyday, but I just added that to the experience of living in Japan. The classes mostly had something to do with Japanese culture and it was required for you to take a Japanese class. I also took a class on Japanese cooking and cooked many different meals. For example, I made Nikujaga. I have learned that most Japanese people can't handle spice very well.

I made quite a few long lasting friendships while in Japan. My new Japanese friends are really nice and they help me with my Japanese by having conversations with me all the time. I would always help them with English. They always had a lot of questions. Even now I am in America they still text me everyday. I spent so much time with them while in Japan, and I can't wait to go back and visit them.

I am planning to graduate in the spring 2023 semester and I have applied for the Jet Program, I don't know if I have been accepted yet.

While I was there I had the opportunity to go to Katano City Ashari Elementary School and help kids practice English. The kids at the school were very friendly and sweet. When I first got to the school I introduced myself in Japanese, then we got separated into groups. I was at a table with only girls and the teacher asked me to speak to them in English so they could practice. They would ask me simple questions like "What is your favorite color or anime?". For some reason whatever answer I gave, they would respond "Me too". "Me too" was a common phrase I heard that day. Then I would ask them the same questions and repeat their answers so they could hear how I pronounced the words. We went between Japanese and English when we spoke to each other. This experience really helped push my decision to apply for the Jet program. I won't know if I got in yet but I hope I do.

In preparation for studying abroad I definitely recommend taking time and researching the culture of wherever you go. I did a lot of research before going to Japan so there weren't many culture shocks that I experienced because I was prepared. I also think that it's better to pay for an extra suitcase instead of paying for the extra weight.

One thing I regret is not going to other places surrounding the area that I lived in. So I would definitely recommend going to as many places as possible because time goes by so fast. Being a Watanabe scholar has meant the world to me, I honestly wouldn't have been able to study abroad without your help. So I am grateful and thankful for the opportunity and the scholarship.



Sari Kamiyama

University of Massachusetts Amherst (Exchange Program)

Firstly, studying abroad in the states meant my personal journey to find my identity again. I lived in Texas for two years when I was 2-4 years old. Though I don't remember almost anything during the period, I recalled the days in Texas as an important part of my life as my parents told me that I was very open and inspiring there. It was an eye-opening experience for me to live in the U.S. because I got the opportunity to rethink my identity as Japanese that I took for granted for a long time. At the same time, as a sociologist, being a minority taught me how society works by experiencing how majority people or policies treat minorities. Furthermore, I gained healthy confidence about myself to get out of my comfort zone and to take a chance no matter how hard it might seem. I dreamed of studying abroad for a long time and even gave up on it during covid period. I got a chance to try it again with the help of my professor and fulfilled my dream two years later. With that regard, I am genuinely grateful for the luck I got with the opportunity and people I encountered, and passion I have kept for a long time. It taught me the importance of being perseverant and having the courage to step forward even if you failed once before.

I'm planning to share my experiences in the states by participating in a TED talk in my university and teaching English at the cram school in my town that I work for. There are many middle schoolers and high schoolers who want to go abroad but don't have an opportunity or financial resources. I myself, too, felt suffocated in my middle and high school years in Japan, trying to find somewhere that I can feel belonging to. So I want to share my stories of both success and failures with them to inspire them to find their way to enrich their own lives with the options to go abroad. Moreover, I joined the instagram team for Watanabe scholars. By managing the instagram page, creating contents about scholars and answering the questions of the future scholars, I want to help them make their study abroad come true. It's especially because I wanted that kind of help when I applied for the Watanabe scholarship.

The community of Watanabe scholarship has given me the community to survive and thrive as a Japanese in the United States. In the beginning of the study abroad, I sometime felt ashamed of my Japanese background as "I'm not American enough." It took me a few months to finally embrace my identity as a Japanese person in the U.S. and felt comfortable with doing some "Japanese things" again proudly, such as saying "Itadakimasu" before eating food or being polite to people in public. Gradually, I found it cool to have a Japanese background. The Watanabe scholarship program offered some workshops and materials to learn and talk about the history of Japanese Americans, which helped me a lot to rethink about my Japanese identity and feel pride in it again.



Shota Yasuraoka

University of California, San Diego (Degree-Seeking)

During my one-year study abroad program at the University of California, San Diego, I learned a great deal in both academics and extracurricular activities. Through these experiences, I was able to clarify the direction of what I want to become in the future. In this report, I will reflect on my year of deepening my self-understanding through my study abroad experience, and as a result, draw some conclusions as to what I want to become in the future.

First, in terms of academics, I took an upper-division class (for juniors and seniors) for the first time in a course related to my major. The content was related to computer vision, and I was able to learn the basics of image analysis using machine learning. Outside of my major, I took a class on market imperfections and policy in economics as a general education course. Here, I gained a better understanding of the impact of government policies such as taxes and subsidies on various stakeholders.

In extracurricular activities, I took a center part in dance for the first time. I am not the one who decides the choreography, but when you are the center, you have to think about the entire group of dancers you are dancing with, and sometimes you have to give instructions to the other members. I was not perfect, but I was able to fulfill my role to some extent. I was glad that my presence in the dance team was more valuable than it had been a year ago, and I had more opportunities to feel like I belonged to the community.

Also, from this semester, job hunting began in earnest. So I was looking at various types of companies in Japan and the U.S. I decided to go for "Japan" and "foreign consulting firms that have a global flavor and are strong in AI and other technology areas.

During my one-year study abroad program at the University of California, San Diego on a Watanabe Scholarship, I was able to deepen my study of my major from both a hardware and software perspective. In addition, I was also able to participate in general education activities such as dance and theater. Secondly, in terms of extracurricular activities, I started participating in a new computing society, and I was able to deepen my friendships with the members of the society at dances, and I felt that I was getting used to life in the US. Finally, through job hunting that started in the spring semester, I had more options than domestic students in terms of being able to choose between Japan and the U.S., but at this point I have come to the conclusion that I want to work in "Japan" for a "foreign consulting firm with a global flavor and strength in AI and other technology areas." During the summer vacation, I will be taking some online classes in Japan, while at the same time, short term internships at foreign consulting firms will be in full swing. I will continue to do my best while making use of the knowledge I gained in the U.S.



Tiffany Barkmeyer
Temple University, Japan Campus (Degree-Seeking)

Studying abroad in Japan has personally allowed me to connect with my mother's culture. I was able to learn more about Japanese culture on different scales. The biggest thing is the language, I was exposed to the language in my everyday life. Whether it be saying good morning to the dorm's front desk ladies or talking to my Japanese friends at school, I was able to utilize my mother's language in numerous ways. Being able to speak and understand Japanese has allowed me to connect with people in so many different ways and I have truly enjoyed connecting with them. Another thing that I learned while staying in Japan that personally impacted me is the way Japanese culture teaches Japanese people to treat and approach specific things and people in a polite manner. Each object is treated with care, and while I had the opportunity to stay in Japan I feel like I have also slowly started to implement that aspect into my own life. I started to take more things into consideration whether it be taking a moment to enjoy the morning air or the dinner provided at my dorm, everything became more of a ritual than a task that I had to do.

Academically, studying abroad meant meeting my current college professors and friends. At my school, we are all so international and diverse allowing us to connect on such a different level. Because our backgrounds are so different, it is sometimes hard for different people to find a common ground, however, thanks to all of our interest in Japan, things have been so much easier. At school, I have noticed that certain concepts like management style or philosophical concepts are merged from western understanding and eastern understanding. This allows a unique blend of different understandings that can be applied (in my opinion) better in the world regardless of where one is located.

Studying in Japan has truly been a blessing. I believe that there are so many things that made my dream become a reality. One of my dreams was to visit Okinawa. I have been to Japan previously, however, Okinawa was one of the places I have never been to. I was able to experience a different style of Japan, often when thinking of Japan I notice that I often think about Tokyo. Okinawa provided a different scenery and I was also able to historically and culturally have the chance to learn about Ryukyuan, Okinawa's Indigenous population. Their culture is truly beautiful, very different from my understanding and my mother's Japanese culture.

Truly this year has been very fulfilling, thank again, to the U.S.-Japan Council Watanabe Scholarship team for selecting me. I had truly an amazing time in Japan and it was nice meeting other Watanabe Scholarship recipients. Meeting new people, sharing goals, and values has constantly helped me become a better version of myself. Thank you guys again for making one of my biggest dreams come true.

Photo Collage

