

My goal for my study abroad experience at Nanzan University was to deepen my understanding of Japanese culture and improve my Japanese language ability. If anything, my semester abroad taught me that there is still so much that I have to learn about the language and culture of Japan. But rather than being overwhelming, the knowledge that I lack so much knowledge is to me exciting and only serves to encourage my desire to continue my studies and further build my relationship and experience with Japan.

Academically, the intensive nature of the Japanese language program at Nanzan University drastically improved my speaking, writing, and comprehensive abilities. If someone had told me 6 months ago that I could excel in a class taught entirely in Japanese, I would have thought they were crazy. Furthermore, the program really gave me a newfound surety and tenacity when speaking and writing in Japanese. I am already starting to notice the lasting effects of my experience studying abroad. This week I sat down and wrote a letter of thanks to my host family in less than 30 minutes; a task which would've seemed so much more intimidating and taken so much longer before this semester abroad; not only due to a lack of vocab and grammar but also simply put a lack in confidence. The other day I was listening to one of my favorite Japanese songs, a song that I have loved for years, and I realized that I finally truly understood what the singer was singing. Today a Japanese advertisement popped up on my Facebook feed, and I was able to read the entire thing. It is small things like this which have really shown me how valuable my time in Japan was for my journey learning the Japanese language.

Building relationships with the people I met in Nagoya was one of the best parts of my exchange. The friends I made and the family I lived with caused my short four months abroad to be so memorable, and something I will cherish forever. Moreover, these relationships allowed me to speak Japanese daily in casual settings, which allowed me to become more comfortable with the Japanese language than ever before. Often learning a new language can feel like a chore, unless you have an outlet to practice what you have learned outside of the classroom. Because I am now able to practice Japanese daily with my friends and family in Nagoya, my passion for learning the Japanese language was once again reignited.

My semester abroad has reinforced my resolve to move to Japan once I graduate. This semester, along with my previous summer in Okinawa, has shown me the importance of cross-cultural understanding and language study. Therefore, I plan on applying to the JET program next year so that I can do my part in helping the next generation become more culturally aware and excited about learning.

And finally, this semester has shown me that Japan could really become a home for me. Thank you for your generosity, which allowed me this incredible opportunity.

Emily Howard