

Kevin Yuan

Tanaka and Green Scholarship – Final Report

I have spent the past year in Japan, studying abroad through the Waseda University Global Leadership Fellows Program. Although the time felt like it flew by in the blink of an eye, I have returned to the United States with many memorable experiences, a greater understanding of Japan, and new friends from all around the world. This past year has been an important formative experience for me, providing me with substantial freedom that allowed me to explore my interests and learn more about myself. When I first arrived in Japan, I felt extremely lost. While it was not my first time in Tokyo, I thought of myself as being alone and isolated in the large city – the sense of being overwhelmed still lingers in my memory. Looking back, since that very first night in Tokyo, I have been able to grow a ton as a person and enjoy the year as much as possible.

Academically, my program allowed me to work closely with a cohort of Japanese and American students, studying together in a small community with a focus on looking at global issues and leadership. We were assigned to work on both group and individual research projects, allowing us to explore different areas of interest relating to current global affairs. My group worked on researching the Olympics, crafting a plan that would aim to make the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games sustainable for the future in areas such as energy, transportation, disaster management, and tourism. For my individual project, I researched how the economy affected citizen voting patterns in both the United States and Japan as a comparative study, tying in my major in economics with the seminar's focus on political science. Beyond my program, I also took language courses to improve my Japanese skills, a wide range of courses on Japan such as modern history and religion, and additional electives that matched my interests, such as video game studies. All-in-all, the wide range of classes at Waseda allowed me to learn about many different areas of study, which will serve as a good foundation for my final upcoming year at Georgetown, for which I will have to write a research paper related to Japan for my major.

Outside of class, I joined the Waseda Piano Society, an opportunity with allowed me to interact with many Japanese students, and even perform in a piano concert (which I hadn't done for over 8 years!). Additionally, I attended many events held by Waseda's Intercultural Communication Center, allowing me to meet people from many different countries. Off-campus, I also worked as an intern with the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan, conducting

research into U.S.-Japan trade relations and designing a website for one of the Chamber's member committees.

However, perhaps my favorite part of the year was traveling around Tokyo and further out in Japan. As part of my program, I went on a bonding camp to Waseda's seminar house in Karuizawa (which was a really great opportunity to get out of Tokyo at the beginning of the year), and a study trip to Okinawa half-way through the year. That trip to Okinawa was very informative and impactful – we had the opportunity to visit one of the U.S. military bases on the island, speak with a former Diet member and Okinawan students about the controversy over U.S. involvement, and walk through museums and caves that taught us the history about Okinawa in World War II. Walking around many of those sites was a deeply moving experience, and it brought attention to an important international issue that is not regularly reported on in mainland Japan or overseas.

Beyond the program trips, I also spent many days traveling to places around Tokyo. Each ward in the nation's capital seemed to have a different atmosphere – from the modern feel of Roppongi, to the natural greenery of Ueno, to the upbeat nightlife of Shinjuku, everywhere had a unique experience to offer. Away from Tokyo, I also took trips to Kamakura/Enoshima, Yokohama, Sendai, Aomori, Hokkaido, and Tottori, each of which offered a different taste of Japan as a nation through unique histories, sceneries, climates, and destinations. Traveling around Japan this year has only reinforced my love for the country, and I look forward to visiting many new places in the future as well.

As I return to D.C. for my final year of college, I look to fully utilize the experiences I have gained from abroad. I plan to stay involved with the Japan-related community, helping out at various organizations and events to promote U.S.-Japan relations. In the near future, I hope to work in Japan through the JET Program as a Coordinator for International Relations, working with a local government office in order to future promote international friendship. Overall, being in Japan for this past year has served to boost my sense of independence, inspiring me to continue pursuing my interests and passions in U.S.-Japan relations. I return to D.C. a year older, with a more globally minded perspective and appreciation for different cultures. This year studying abroad has introduced me to so many new friends and opportunities, and I can't wait until the next time I return to Japan.