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Tanaka Green Final Report

My favorite event of the day was always walking to school. I was lucky enough to find an apartment that was a 10 minute walk from the Aoyama campus in the heart of Shibuya. Everyday I could see the people busily rushing around, grabbing their breakfast and coffee, catching a glimpse at the new Shibuya Sky building attached to the train station. This scene always made me feel so small but, also like I was a part of something bigger. I found comfort in the melancholy of being surrounded by strangers. I didn't know anyone, let alone what they were saying, but it felt like I belonged there. Sometimes I would visit the local shrine and throw a 5 yen in for good luck or pray before an exam. The Starbucks baristas even started to recognize me when I would come in. I had such a unique and beautiful experience living and studying Japan for my study abroad exchange.

Japanese college is so different from college in America. First of all, most courses at my college were lecture based. We would go to class, listen to the lecture and discuss the topic at hand. I really enjoyed this type of learning style. My professors would raise invoking questions and allow the students to discuss their opinions and share outside articles in class.. However, not all classes were like this. A lot of these discussion based classes are based on if anyone joins the discussion or not. international students were more than willing to speak their opinion while, many of the Japanese students were shy and not very willing to participate. Because of this, there was a high expectation of the quality of work from the international students. The teachers would also always call on the exchange students and give us pleading stares to speak up or answer a question. This did put a lot of pressure on me as a student I had never experienced before. Regardless of these instances, I think American college, maybe even high school courses were more difficult and stressful due to the workload.

This was my opinion on the main courses at Aoyama. However, I have a completely different opinion on the Japanese language courses. Japanese itself is a very difficult language to learn and I felt like I was being pushed to learn a lot. I didn't like that there was little review and that the homework was very repetitive and made it hard to stay engaged in class and the homework. We also had to give many speaking presentations which was really nerve wracking at first but I really feel like my conversational Japanese improved the most.

This all increased 10-fold when online classes were set up due to COVID. Many of the professors were not very knowledgeable about how to use the zoom and webex platforms. This made the first few weeks very frustrating. In fact, my semester started a whole month later than expected because the school had to create an online platform for the students and teachers to properly interact through. The website was often prone to crashing which would leave students in disarray at not being able to attend classes on time. I almost missed a midterm because of the site crashing before my class started. I even heard from a friend at another university, students had designated times that they were allowed to long in the site in order to keep a handle on how

many people were accessing the website. This did improve towards the end of the semester and finals went smoothly.

Before COVID hit, I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to have my first semester on campus. I decided to really throw myself into the campus life to get the best experience I could. I joined the Aikido club and I would go to practice three times a week for 3 hours. After practice we would all walk together to the station just chatting and learning about each other. During October we had a school festival where all the clubs were going to do a performance. We had a stall set up and sold gohei mochi over the 3 day weekend to make money for the club. We were able to sell out of our mochi and threw a really big after party with the money we raised (as well as purchasing new equipment). I took the test to make it to the next level and got to join in the seiretsu (ceremony before and after practice). I made such good friends with the Aikido club and I was supposed to go with everyone to a training camp in Chiba before COVID hit. Unfortunately we did not get to practice together again. The night before I left Japan, the Aikido club had a gathering and they gave me a souvenir t-shirt that said the Aikido club's name on it. I felt like I had been fully accepted and cried so much.

I made such wonderful, life long friends and felt so accepted into Japanese culture. Japanese people are very warm and welcoming. They really love it when other people want to experience their culture, as long as they take it seriously and respect the rules. I feel like I missed out on a lot of opportunities due to the COVID pandemic. I had such a wonderful experience in the first half of my stay that I want to try and go back to Japan. I want to improve my Japanese even more and try to have more experience of living in Japan. I want to establish and deepen my friendships with the Aikido club and other students I met during my time in Japan.