

PART B – Returning Student Information Record



The Basics

Host country	<input type="text" value="Japan"/>	University	<input type="text" value="Meiji University"/>
Uof A Faculty	<input type="text" value="Arts"/>	UofA major during exchange	<input type="text" value="Linguistics"/>
U of A session during which you did your exchange (ie. Sept – Dec, 2006)		<input type="text" value="Sept 2012 - Feb 2013"/>	

Pre-arrival

1. What arrangements regarding course registration were you able to coordinate before you started your exchange? (i.e. were you able to pre-register for courses from Canada?) If so, did your course registration change upon arrival to your host university?	All of the course registration was done once I arrived in Japan. During orientation, we were given a syllabi book with a description of the all the courses offered in the department I chose to enroll in. Registration dates/deadlines varied between departments and are FINAL so be sure to triple check it before submitting it. Changes are NOT allowed.
2. What arrangements regarding pre-approval of credit transfer were you able to arrange with your faculty before you left on exchange? Do you have any suggestions for future exchange students in your faculty to get pre-approval of courses before they leave for their exchange programs?	No, I didn't receive pre-approved credit transfer. Since the course content will vary, I think it'd be hard to get pre-approved credit.
3. Were you able to secure on campus housing at your host university before your arrival in your host country? Could you apply for housing before you were formally accepted to your host university?	The housing application form was part of the application package and as long as the form is submitted on time, housing should be guaranteed before arrival.
4. What immigration (i.e. student visa, residence permits etc.) documents are required to study at your host university if you studied abroad as a Canadian citizen? Please describe the application process for immigration documents for your host country.	A study visa was required. I had to wait till Meiji University sent me the necessary documents before making an appointment at the Japanese Consulate in Calgary to apply for the visa. It took about 1 week for the visa to be ready.

Arrival

1. In getting from Alberta to your host institution where there any particular travel issues that arose that may be helpful when future students are making travel arrangement. (i.e. is there a check-in time for dorms - for example must you sign in by 6:00pm?)	If you're moving into any of the international houses, there are preferred arrival times so that volunteers can help you get to the residence.
2. What assistance, if any, did you receive when you arrived at your exchange destination? (i.e. airport pick-up available?)	You can request to have a student volunteer meet you at Shinjuku Stn. where they will help you to the residence. Meiji University provides instructions on how to get from the airport to the stn.

Orientation and Assistance

1. Briefly describe the orientation and assistance available to international students at your host university.	There was a thorough orientation for all exchange students, where we received our syllabi, information about the health checks, getting health insurance and took Japanese language placement tests. There was a separate department orientation as well. The orientation was very helpful.
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2. What help did you receive from the international staff or office? Please describe the assistance that was provided and how responsive was the staff.

The staff at the Surugadai International Student Office were accessible in person or by email and spoke English. They were always very kind and helpful and tried to do their best to accommodate certain requests but due to uni rules, it wasn't always allowed (eg. I tried to move from Komae IH to Izumi IH).

3. Where could you go at your host university if you had questions or concerns about academics (please list the office)? ...about exchange student advising (i.e. Faculty or International Office)? ...for general assistance?

If it's an academic concern → department office; if it's an exchange student concern/general assistance → international student office.

Housing

1. To the best of your knowledge what housing options are available to exchange students? Are there any considerations students should be aware of when making housing decisions (i.e. are campus dorms five kilometres from campus and there are apartments just across the road)?

4 options:

Izumi International House- international students only
Komae International House- Japanese and international students
Homestay- arranged by third party company, JTB Homestay
Own arrangement- different homestay company, apartment...
Izumi IH is located on Izumi campus; Komae IH is off-campus. It really depends which campus(es) your classes will be held but it's likely travel will be necessary

2. How early could students move in to housing at the beginning of term? Is it necessary to book any temporary accommodation if you plan on arriving early? Can international students stay in the residences during major holidays?

There are specific move-in dates for both Izumi International House and Komae International House. If you move-in earlier than the specified dates, you may need to book temporary accommodation. International students can stay in the residences during major holidays.

3. What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities?

Izumi IH- there is a shared kitchen between 6-8 flatmates
Komae IH- there is the meal plan option incl. breakfast (Japanese style option or Western style option) and dinner from Mon-Sat, or light cooking in your own room with a portable IH cooking pad is provided.
Japan doesn't really have ovens, so you can't really bake things...

4. What should future exchange students know about living in the residences? How satisfied were you with the housing you chose? Please include the name and describe your choice of housing.

Izumi IH- only the kitchen/laundry is shared because everyone has their own room; Komae IH- apartment-style so it's hard to interact w/ everyone; everyone has their own room, the common area is the cafeteria/dining area. I lived here and would've liked to have more space to meet w/ friends other than the cafeteria and my room. The dorm mother was quite strict. The meals were really tasty!

Course Registration

1. Please describe the course registration process at your host university. What help was available for this?

Course registration depends on what department you're in. For Global Japanese Studies, I chose classes by referring to: a document that had dates and times of courses offered that term and reading the syllabi. Then I had to fill out what courses I wanted on a bubble sheet and hand it in to the department office. Once you hand in the bubble sheet, registration is considered finalized so it is VERY IMPORTANT that you make sure you wrote down the correct course codes. One friend accidentally wrote down the wrong course code (which differed only by one # and was listed right underneath the course she wanted to take) and they wouldn't let her change her registration ☹

2. What did your academic plan look like? (i.e. how many courses per term; did you complete one course at a time or multiple courses at the same time). Please describe the credit and grading system (i.e. ECTS or other grading system, number of contact hours per course, etc.)

I took 3 courses and had to take a mandatory seminar course. Each course was worth 2 credits. The seminar course is like an additional class except with fewer students and is usually about a specific topic based on the professor's field of research. I looked on the Meiji website at professors profiles to choose which professor's seminar course I wanted to attend (which you had to choose when applying).

3. Any general tips or comments about course registration for future students?

Unlike UofA, there is no registration period where you can swap or add courses. There is a short period of about 3 days when you are allowed to drop courses and there is a notice on the Oh Meiji system. It's advisable to visit the classes that interest you and register in as many classes as you want (up to the max of 20credits) because you can drop them later if you don't like them. BUT, I remember that you could only drop a max of 3 courses.

Don't hesitate to go to your department office and ask questions!

Academics

1. Indicate your assessment of the academic program at your partner university in comparison to the U of A? (quality, class structure, etc.)

It definitely varies from course to course. I mainly took classes in English and found the quality to be a bit lacking compared to what I'm used to at the U of A. Expectations and course requirements were much lower.

2. How did the style of teaching at your partner university compare with that at U of A? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at U of A?

For the most part, professors stood at the front of the classrooms giving lectures and no one asked questions during the lecture. In one of my classes, the professor didn't teach at all and every class there was a student presentation based on material from the textbook. Students' classroom attitudes were also surprising. They would sleep, chatter, be on their phone during class and the professor wouldn't say anything! But of course, this can vary from class to class.

3. What was the process for obtaining a transcript for your work completed on exchange?

One copy will be sent for free to the Education Abroad office. To order more, I had to go to the department office and fill out a form. Each copy was 200yen. Make sure to note that you want it in English and sealed in an envelope. If not, they'll send all copies in one envelope and future universities won't accept unsealed transcripts.

4. Any advice to future exchange students to help them succeed academically at your host university?

I found the workload to be a bit lighter and definitely manageable but can pile up very easily!
The Japanese language classes required the most time in terms of homework and readings. Put in a little effort into learning the material for all your classes and it will definitely go a long way!

5. Please describe the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your partner university.

There are computer labs and students have free printing credit (which is great!) that can be used. The library at Izumi campus is new and very nice to study in. Nakano campus opened spring 2013 so there are lots of new facilities there as well.

6. What electronic devices would you recommend a U of A student bring (laptop, PDA, etc.)? Are voltage or other adaptors necessary? If so please provide specific information.

Definitely bring a laptop! Internet is available in the dorms via LAN cable. It'll be a lot easier to do assignments and surf the internet. Voltage in Japan is 110volts and 2 prong outlets. My items worked as long as the plug was 2 prongs. It might be a good idea to get a travel adapter for any 3 prong cables.

7. General comments regarding the academic program at your host institution.

I feel like I like would've learned more and experienced what Japanese university life would be like if I took some classes in Japanese. Some of the English classes were very interesting but were taught in consideration of Japanese students learning English.

Languages

1. In what language were courses predominantly taught at your host institution? Were there courses taught in English? If so, were there adequate course offerings in your field of study?

Classes were taught in Japanese and in the Global Japanese Studies department, there were many classes offered in English. There were a few classes related to my major but not many and I did take some but I don't feel like I learned anything.

2. For how long and at what level (U of A level i.e. 100, 200, 300) had you studied this language before your departure?

I completed Japanese 400 level before going abroad.

3. What affect did working in a foreign language have on your grades? Did your instructors make any special allowances (i.e. accepting assessment in English) in light of the fact that the language of instruction was not your first language?

All of my courses were in English so evaluations were also done in English. In other classes, it's a good idea to talk to the professor about allowing you to write your exams or papers in English.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

1. Are there any particular extra-curricular and organized activities, that were available to students on campus that you would like to share? (i.e. clubs, sports, hall activities, volunteer opportunities)

There were clubs at the university but I was never sure how to join them. If you are interested, I definitely recommend asking your Japanese supporter or friends to help you because it'll add to your experience!

2. What work or internship opportunities were there for students on campus, off campus?

Meiji says that students can't work but a few of my friends did without troubles. My friends worked part-time at convenience stores, restaurants and bakeries and a work visa was needed.

Health and Safety

1. Are there any specific health/safety issues future students should be made aware of? Are there any precautions that you can recommend to mitigate or eliminate these issues?

I know that before going, there were radioactivity scares because of the Fukushima nuclear incident. I researched it thoroughly and suggest others do the same and come to their own conclusions. There were a few minor earthquakes in Tokyo now and then but nothing too serious. If you're staying during the summer months, you'll likely experience typhoon season as well.

2. Are there any unique provincial, federal, regional, or institutional legislations, regulations, customs, or laws that future students should be made aware of?

Not that I'm aware of.

There are a lot of unspoken cultural norms that you will likely pick up on during your stay.

3. Did your host institution provide a mandatory travel/health insurance plan for exchange students? How did you arrange this? (i.e. on arrival at a specific office)

Yes, there was mandatory health insurance from Meiji Univ and national health insurance. Meiji Univ provided info about this at orientation. For the national health insurance, registration was done at the local ward office and my supporter helped me with that.

Personal and Cultural Connections

1. What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country? What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?

I had learned about Japanese culture before going so that definitely helped with adjusting. Tokyo is a very crowded city and the weather is also very different from Edmonton weather. Adjusting to the loss of personal space (especially on trains!!) was difficult. I had to ride the trains during rush hour everyday so I had to get used to it quickly but I'm used to having a bigger personal bubble than I had in Japan.

2. What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The food culture in Japan is great! There were so many delicious things to try. I also loved the juxtaposition between history and modern society. In the hustle bustle of the city, Meiji Shrine was a serene peaceful place to visit.

3. As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with differing abilities to study at your host university? To the best of your knowledge what are the general attitudes towards people with differing abilities, differing sexual orientations and visible minorities. What infrastructure is in place and are there services available for these students?

I think it might be difficult for students w/ differing abilities if they don't have a good command of Japanese. The youth are generally more accepting of people with differing abilities and sexual orientations. Being a visible minority can be unnerving at times and it helps to speak with friends about it. I'm not aware of specific services but the international student advisor in the Intl. Student Lounge (Prof. Kitawaki) is someone you can talk with.

Print Form

PART C – Returning Student Information Record

Host country

Japan

University

Meiji University

Costs and Budgeting - Please describe your basic costs in Canadian dollars. This will help future exchange students plan their own budgets

Airfare to host country	\$ 980	Brief Description	
Visa fees	\$ 0	Brief Description	Will need to visit the Consulate in Calgary
Books/term	\$ 50	Brief Description	
Accommodation/month	\$ 515 + ~15	Brief Description	Rent at Komae IH, electricity charged separately
Meals/month	\$ 300~400	Brief Description	Meal plan at Komae IH, eating out, groceries
Health insurance/term	\$ 80	Brief Description	Meiji Univ and National Health Insurance (NHI)
Local transportation/month	\$ 115	Brief Description	Can get costly if you go to lots of places
Personal spending/month	\$ 100	Brief Description	
Communications/month (ie phone)	\$ 3300 JPY/60 days	Brief Description	Softbank prepaid phone since I was staying only 6 months and couldn't afford contract cancellation \$
Other travel	\$	Brief Description	

What unexpected costs did you encounter?

Paying for the doctor's visit and medicine when I got sick. The NHI covered some of the unexpected cost. If you're referred to a specialist, go to one that's also covered by Meiji to ↓ costs

Funding Your International Experience - Please describe how you financed your education abroad program in Canadian dollars. This will help future exchange students plan their own budgets.

Scholarships from the U of A	\$ 0	Brief Description	
Scholarships from host institution	\$ 0	Brief Description	
Student loans	\$ 9000	Brief Description	
Family contributions	\$ 1000	Brief Description	
Personal savings	\$ 4000	Brief Description	
Employment while in host country	\$ N/A	Brief Description	Some friends did find part-time jobs at bakeries, convenience stores, restaurants.

Final Reflections

1. What are the 5 most important things for future exchange students to take with them when they go to your host country or region?

Laptop, camera, snacks from home, enough \$\$, proper voltage plugs!

Snacks for yourself and some to share with new friends ☺

Tokyo is expensive and there are so many things to do and eat and buy. I was definitely in a bind a few times when it came to having enough money. It's awful to have to worry about money all the time when you should really be having fun and enjoying the experience!

2. What are the 5 most important things you would tell a U of A student who is going to your host university on exchange?

-Keep a journal/blog/tumblr- time will FLY! And before you know it everything will be over. It's a great way to preserve all the good times!

-Make a list of things that you want to do because you never know when you have a free afternoon with nothing to do

-Japan is very, very different from Canada and it will help to know about the culture beforehand to minimize the culture shock

-Likewise, Japanese uni student life is pretty different too

-Be sure to check out a Meiji Univ Baseball game

3. What was your greatest challenge on the exchange?

Making friends and being sick.

I'm a shy person and Japanese students were quite shy too. Going to group events helped because usually everyone's there to make new friends and have a good time. Also, ask out Japanese friends if there's a festival or new food that you want to try. Festivals and whatnot are normal to them so it's not obvious that it's something that would interest others from other cultures.

Being sick was awful and I recommend resting and recovering. If you have to go to a specialist, ask Japanese friend to go with you to help with the translation.

4. Final words about your entire exchange experience?

I had an amazing time in Tokyo and I miss it everyday. I'm sure I will be visiting Japan more in the future but I'm glad that I got to experience life as a university student in Japan because that won't likely happen again.

5. Share with us any additional information or provide tips that you would have valued before leaving on exchange.

Having an open mind is definitely key. Being immersed in a different culture was eye-opening and at first, it was easy to compare Japan and Canada and only see the imperfections of Japan. I think the faster one can acknowledge the cultural differences both the good and bad, the better and more enriching the whole study abroad experience will be! After all, Japan will stay the same after you leave, but you'll be the one that has changed ☺

Print Form