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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



2018 JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR SPECIALISTS IN CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC FIELDS (SHORT-TERM) BY ERIC FUNABASHI

The University of Kansas

It has been over a month since I left the Japanese Language Institute in Kansai, but I can still feel the smell of the ocean and the humidity from Japanese summer. The Japanese Language Program for Specialists in Cultural and Academic Field was truly an invaluable professional and personal experience.

The structure of classes is, in my opinion, the strongest point of the program. The group is divided according to each participant's level allowing each student to focus on personal necessities. I can use my own situation as an example. Due to previous experiences and personal interests, my Japanese skills are very unbalanced as I have a good speaking level, but poor reading skills. Therefore, the division in different classes according to my level in each area allowed me to give priority to my weaknesses as well as keep improving upon my stronger skills. In addition, a regular individual meeting with a tutor-professor helped me to work on my personal concerns that were not addressed during lectures such as preparation to talk about my research in a profession

as well as conduct interviews related to my academic project. Every professor's attention was crucial to create an appropriate environment in which every student could develop as much as possible of their own necessities.

Another unique aspect of this program is the extra-curricular activities. Visiting a Japanese family, exploring Osaka under a specific schedule and attending a cultural exchange meeting with graduate students from Kobe University were some events I participated during the program. This not only put our language learning to test, but also helped in creating bonds with other participants in the program. This year there were 13 participants from the United States, Canada, Egypt, Indonesia, China, Korea, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, Russia and Ukraine and such variety of cultures only enriched the learning process.

Two events that directly related to my own research, which I really appreciated, were the speech preparation and the Tokyo research trip. Since I am at the early stage of my Ph.D. program, I never had the opportunity (or the requirement) to present my research topic to the public without expertise in the field. Having this opportunity with a tutor closely following and orienting my steps was a great addition to the language study. Feedback received from professors and other people after presenting or briefly talking about my research interest were a great motivation to expand and further explore different aspects of my own research. The second event, the Tokyo research trip, was also an amazing experience. Being able to visit places related to my research, discover primary sources and conduct interview with people directly related to my research interest was an experience I will never forget. Moreover, Tajiri-cho cannot be compared to Tokyo in terms of size or number of people and being able to experience the life in Japan's biggest city enhanced my understanding of the Japanese society.

I also need to mention the structure at the Kansai Institute. The self-study room has a great variety of study material for any level of Japanese as well as computers to provide support or inquiries for additional information. Even more impressive was the support from the institute's library and its staff. Materials related to my field of expertise (Food History) is not easily found even in universities' libraries, however, when the library staff was informed of my participation in the program they promptly provided new books about food history in order to offer me research material. I really



appreciate their effort in searching for material relevant to my own research even though it might be a topic that is not commonly accessed.

It has been over a month since I left Tajiri-cho and the Kansai Institute, but my professional and personal developments during this 2-month program were so intense that I still catch myself wondering if next weekend we should explore more of the vivid city of Osaka or treat ourselves with fresh fish at the port close to the Institute. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to participate in the 2-month program; I only wished it could last longer as 2 months passed in a blink of an eye. I really appreciate the effort from professors and staff members in making it a great experience; I can guarantee you really did it! This is an experience I will never forget.

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5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100
Los Angeles, CA 90036
P. 323.761.7510

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