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JASWDC Tanaka and Green Scholarship Essay

During my fall semester I was able to greatly increase my Japanese abilities by applying them not only in the casual day-to-day setting, but in more formal settings as well. For instance, I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with local Japanese individuals for my Japanese classes. The first person I interviewed was a Kyoto-based author named Kanchiku Izumi.

Kanchiku Izumi writes romance novels and has collaborated with manga artists to create romance manga. I conducted an interview with her and wrote an article based on the interview for my Japanese class. Through this opportunity, I was not only able to test my Japanese skills, but I was also able to learn how to write a professional article in Japanese. I am also grateful for the opportunity to connect with such an incredible and accomplished individual, and plan to remain in contact with her in the future.

Another interview I conducted was for my class on Japanese Religion. I decided to do a paper on new religions in Japan, specifically Konkokyo, which is a new religion based in Okayama, with around 400,000 registered followers. I was able to interview one of the “priests” of Konkokyo in the Kyoto branch office. In the spring, I plan to continue this research as Independent Study. I plan to use this research as a Senior Thesis proposal.

Prior to my study abroad trip in Kyoto, I did not know much about Japanese religions. However since Kyoto is home to such a vast array of temples, shrines and various historical sites, we were able to travel to the locations. Sometimes we were able to speak with the priests themselves, or listen to a lecture from a follower of the religion. Many of these lectures and tours were conducted in Japanese, with our teacher translating difficult portions into English. This served to improve my knowledge of Japan and Japanese religions while simultaneously improving my Japanese language skills.

Another part of the KCJS program was the Community Involvement Project (CIP), which essentially dictates that students must join a community activity during their time abroad. I chose to join the Doshisha Fine Arts Circle, Kurama, and attended weekly sketch sessions. It was difficult to understand my fellow peers’ Japanese, and though I slowly began to get better at deciphering what they were saying, it remains a challenge for me to understand group conversations with friends in Japanese. Especially since Doshisha university is in Kansai and most of the students are from the Kansai region, many had very strong accents as well as individualized speaking patterns which made it

difficult to understand when they spoke very quickly. I was also able to help the club set up for the school festival, where the Kurama club created a haunted house and sold portraits. I was able to experience Japanese college life, and I understood more about senpai-kouhai relationships, as well as the role of “circles” in Japanese university student life.

This study abroad trip was a challenge to me academically and emotionally, as all study abroad trips are. Though I have been abroad in Japan before, it was still difficult as there are always new situations that I am not sure how to deal with. However, I was able to forge deeper bonds with Japanese students due to the semester-long program, and I hope that I will be able to continue these connections into the future. In terms of academic progress, my Japanese language skills improved and I was able to learn how to use Japanese in more formal settings. I also identified an area of interest in research which I plan to carry into a Senior Thesis. I also plan to apply for some research grants in the summer to do fieldwork in Konkokyo churches in Japan.

Since the fall semester program was so beneficial, I decided to extend my one semester to the full academic year. I plan to continue my Japanese language studies and delve deeper into my research on new religions in the spring semester.