



2019-2020
WATANABE SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

U.S.-Japan Council

Generously Supported by the Toshizo Watanabe Endowment Fund

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Executive Summary

2019 was another busy and exciting year for the Watanabe Scholarship, with three special programs planned for the Watanabe Scholars. In February, the 2018-2019 Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend was held in Los Angeles for Japanese studying in the United States and a few American scholars who were getting ready to depart for their Spring 2019 semester in Japan. The scholars enjoyed getting to know each other as well as meeting the USJC regional chairs at a reception organized by USJC. Photos from the 2018-2019 Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend can be viewed [here](#).

For the 2019-2020 scholarship cycle, a total of 40 students (20 Japanese and 20 Americans) were selected to receive the scholarship. This is four times the number of recipients in the inaugural year. The scholars' bios can be found online ([Japanese](#) & [American](#)) and some of their introductory videos are posted at the bottom of the [scholarship web page](#). We found 40 to be the largest cohort size we would recommend for this scholarship.

In September 2019, the Watanabe Scholarship team conducted a second promotional tour in Japan and visited five schools in the Tohoku region (Akita, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures) to meet with administrators. The Tohoku region was chosen for this tour, since the team covered the Kanto, Chubu, Kansai, and Kyushu region in the previous tour in 2017. Although some schools we visited had heard of the scholarship - from either their students applying to it or receiving the scholarship in previous years - they were interested in learning more about the application process and eligibility so that they could share the opportunity with as many students as possible. The team also tabled at America Expo 2019 ([アメリカ留学 Expo](#)), a study abroad fair organized by the U.S. Embassy of Tokyo, to speak with students and guardians who were interested in learning about financial resources that can be applied towards their potential study abroad in the United States.

To further expand our promotional outreach, a total of nine virtual info sessions were organized for American and Japanese students and administrators. Sessions organized for the students (both U.S. and Japanese) were the most well-attended, with as many as 60 attendees in one of the sessions. It is clear from the information sessions that there is a lot of interest in the scholarship; some students shared that there are limited scholarships and loans available to international degree-seeking students and graduate students, and were grateful to find out about the Watanabe Scholarship.



Watanabe Scholarship Team visits Akita University on their 2019 promotional tour



Watanabe Scholarship and TOMODACHI table at America Expo 2019



Dinner with Watanabe Scholarship Alumni

In December 2019, the Watanabe Leadership Weekend in Tokyo was held for the American Watanabe Scholars from the 2019-2020 cohort. This was the first time to hold a stand-alone Leadership Weekend in Japan, and while there were a few challenges in planning it remotely, the team was able to put together a successful program after thorough venue and restaurant research, and careful recruitment of Japan-based speakers in the USJC community. The goal for the program was to provide an opportunity for the scholars to hear from notable leaders from Japan and the United States; learn about the history of Japanese-Americans in the United States; and discuss what it means to be a Global Citizen, including plans for supporting U.S.-Japan relations in the future. The scholars also had a chance to meet with USJC members, TOMODACHI Program Alumni, and Watanabe Scholarship alumni through different sessions held during the weekend. Photos from the Leadership Weekend can be found [here](#).

We strive to stay connected with scholars from the current and past cohorts. During the September promotional tour, the team hosted a dinner for Watanabe Scholarship alumni in Shibuya, at which ten alumni from across three different cohorts gathered. This was an exciting occasion for us to reconnect with the scholars and for scholars to connect with one another to hear each of their academic and career updates.



Watanabe Scholars on the last day of Leadership Weekend



Although the scholarship is operated with limited staff, the Watanabe Scholarship Team makes every effort to promote the scholarship when and where possible, especially to the Japanese audiences, as resources for study abroad scholarships seem to be limited. During their stay in Tokyo, Grace Kim, Program Manager and Administrator of the Watanabe Scholarship, attended the American University & Graduate School Information Session (アメリカ大学・大学院留学説明会), an information session organized by Fulbright and [EducationUSA](#) to promote the Watanabe Scholarship. We will continue to work with the U.S. Embassy of Japan and take on other opportunities to promote the scholarship.

We believe it is important to offer encouragement and support for the scholars throughout their time in Japan or the United States. Since 2017, it has been customary to prepare a small care packages for each scholar, consisting of snacks and self-care items from their respective home countries. Distributing these care packages during in-person meetings (i.e. Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend, Annual Conference, etc.) is something that we look forward to every year. Although it is a small gesture, we have seen that it brings them joy to receive a bag filled with items that they miss from home.



Portion of the Japanese items purchased for the care package.



On April 29 and May 2, 2020, a virtual meet-up and check-in was organized for alumni of the Watanabe Scholarship and [TOMODACHI Daiwa House Student Leadership Conference](#) (a program that was run out of the DC office between 2015-2018). Alumni in both the United States and Japan joined the call to share the challenges they have experienced due to the coronavirus pandemic. Watanabe Scholars across different cohorts gathered to reconnect and provide updates on their lives.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the majority of the 2019-2020 Watanabe Scholars had to return home or move off campus as institutions cancelled their study abroad programs and closed their dorms. The program for the four American scholars scheduled for the Spring 2020 semester was cancelled. An adjustment has been made to this year's scholarship; we will give flexibility for scholars to defer use of the scholarship to the Spring 2021 semester or the Fall 2021 – Spring 2022 academic year and the application will not open for the Fall 2021 – Spring 2022 academic year. Due to those students who cannot defer, there may be fewer than 40 scholars in the 2020 – 2022 cohort.

We are grateful to the Watanabe Foundation for the generous endowment gift that makes this scholarship possible. There has been a tremendous and positive response to the scholarship by both American and Japanese students who plan to study abroad. We would also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Watanabe for making the time to meet and get to know the scholars over dinner during the Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend (LA and Tokyo) and the 2019 USJC Annual Conference in LA. We look forward to the continued success of the Watanabe Scholarship program. We hope you enjoy this report.

Sincerely,

Grace Kim, Program Manager

About the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship Program

The Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship Fund provides financial assistance to undergraduate and graduate students for a semester or year-long study abroad program in either the United States or Japan. A generous endowment gift of \$10 million from Mr. Toshizo (Tom) Watanabe to the U.S.- Japan Council makes it possible to award scholarships to students for whom study abroad would not be possible without financial support.

The scholarship supports up to the full cost of attendance to the study abroad program of the applicant's choice. The scholarship program grants awards to recipients in amounts determined by financial need and other qualifications.

The U.S.-Japan Council Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship will provide financial assistance to undergraduate/graduate students for a term or year-long study abroad program in the United States or Japan. Mr. Watanabe's gift funds scholarships for Japanese and American students with leadership potential, for whom study abroad would not be possible otherwise. For the inaugural program years of 2016-18, the scholarship supported Japanese undergraduate students who studied in the United States. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, the scholarship also supports American students studying in Japan.

The Council will recruit, select, and support scholarship recipients, welcoming them to the TOMODACHI Generation as future leaders and contributors to the U.S.-Japan relationship. For more information, please see: <https://www.usjapancouncil.org/watanabe-scholarship/>.



Mr. Watanabe (front row, second from left) and Mrs. Watanabe (front row, third from right) with the inaugural year (2016-17) Watanabe Scholars

Scholarship Statistics

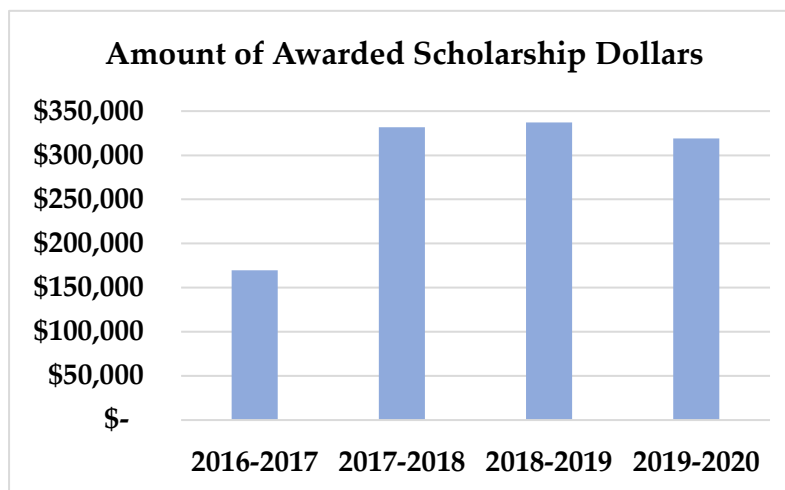
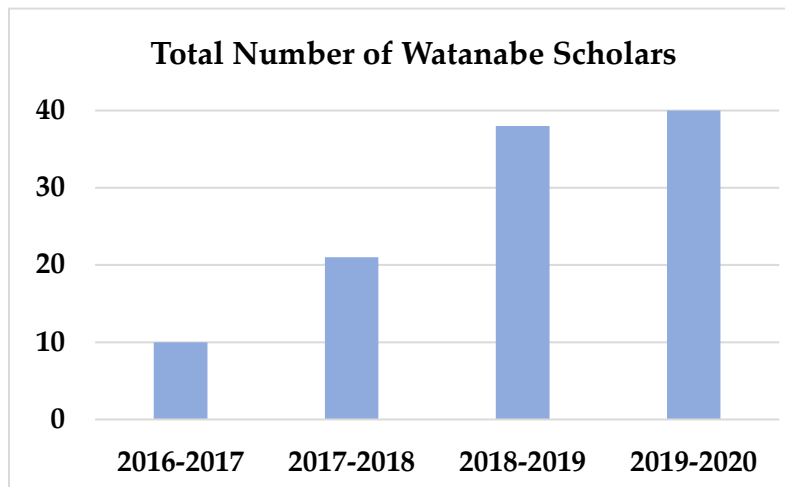
**Total # schools that applied in 2019-20 cycle
(based on applicants' home institutions)**



174

**Promotional Visit to Schools in Japan
(September 2019)**

- Akita University
- Akita International University
- Iwate University
- Ishinomaki Senshu University
- Tohoku University



2019-2020 Watanabe Scholars' School List*

Japanese Scholars Studied at...

- Bates College
- Berklee College of Music
- Brown University
- California State University, San Marcos
- Columbia University
- The College of William and Mary
- Georgia State University
- Maryville University
- San Jose State University
- Stanford University
- Temple University
- Tufts University
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of California, Davis
- University of Hawaii, Manoa
- University of Mississippi
- University of Nevada, Reno
- University of Washington

Their Home Schools included...

(For those on exchange programs)

- Japan Women's University
- Keio University
- Kobe University
- Kyoto University
- Kyushu University
- Temple University, Japan Campus
- Tohoku University
- Tokyo International University
- Toyo University
- University of Tokyo
- Waseda University

American Scholars Studied at...

- International Christian University
- Kansai University
- Kwansei Gakuin University
- Kyoto University
- Meiji Gakuin University
- Nagoya Gakuin University
- Nanzan University
- Shinshu University
- Temple University, Japan Campus
- Tokyo International University in Kawagoe
- Waseda University

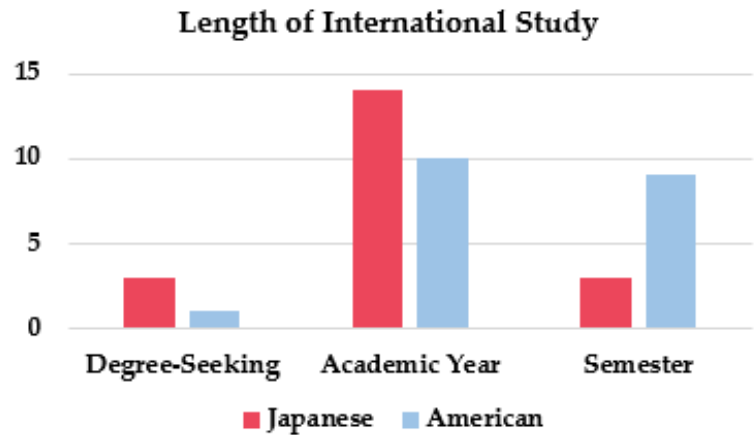
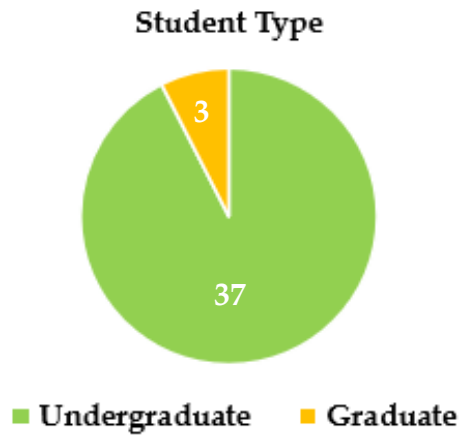
Their Home Schools included...

(For those on exchange programs)

- Colorado College
- Fort Lewis College
- Nebraska Wesleyan University
- Northern Arizona University
- Ohio Wesleyan University
- Oklahoma State University
- Seattle Central College
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of California, San Diego
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- University of Maryland

*Excludes home & host schools of the four American scholars whose study abroad in Japan for the Spring 2020 semester was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2019-2020 Scholars At-A-Glance*



Female: 27
Male: 13



40% from Single
Parent Household



32.5% First Generation
Students



20 Japanese Scholars



20 American Scholars

*Statistics includes four American scholars whose study abroad in Japan for the Spring 2020 semester was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all scholars attended programming (e.g. Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend or USJC Annual Conference) that was required as part of receiving the scholarship.

Watanabe Scholars Highlights



Karla Aceves

International Christian University

(from University of California San Diego)

It has been my dream to go to Japan one day, ever since I was 8 or 9 years old, and make the world I found in my books into reality. I was able to put meaning and memories and people behind some of the most iconic symbols of Japan. Tokyo was beyond what I expected. **A big take-away for me was being able to expand my world views and put faces to the Japanese people.** This opportunity and my experiences demystified my view of Japan. I learned to navigate myself in an unknown environment where I did not know the language. I also got out of my comfort zone a lot. For example, I never thought I would join an acapella at ICU especially since I had never been comfortable singing in front of others, and I get stage fright. However, my love of singing (even if it was only when I was alone) and my will to seize this once in a lifetime opportunity led me to make very good friends that helped me get through my insecurities to sing my heart out in front of all the other students at ICU.

The academics were just as memorable. Things I didn't expect were that classes were taught in English since it was a school that emphasized international exchanges and other international students were English speakers so I didn't interact with other Japanese-born students until I joined clubs. It was hard to make friends with those Japanese students I met in tennis and acapella because of the language barrier which made following along in conversations difficult. However, I never felt left out because everyone was kind and with their limited English and my limited Japanese, we made it work.

After making my dreams of studying abroad come true, I have found new aspirations to look forward to. **I hope to go back to Japan one day and find work there in my field.** I am working hard to become a competitive candidate in preparation for when I apply to an international branch of aerospace companies in the US set in Japan.





Chihiro Ban

San Jose State University (from Kyushu University)

I the fall 2019 semester, I had five classes: Human Sexuality, Theories of Culture, Culture and Conflict, Writing Seminar, and Religion and Anthropology. It was challenging for me to take five because every class has massive essays and reading every week. However, looking back, it was worth trying even though I stayed up all night during the exam week. **Through much readings and writings, my English skill has improved a lot.** I will never hesitate to ask questions in English to my professor and to read some news articles. It was a big step to make me read any English stuff easily. Also, understanding the backgrounds of the American context helps me to learn the United States more profoundly.

Next semester, I am going to take a programming class. Since I came to San Jose, I got many opportunities to meet business people and to see what is going to happen in the future. Also, I learned how essential to try everything that we are interested in because they will connect in the future after all. This made me decide to learn to program even though my major is not computer science, and I want to specialize in a specific area.

Besides, I enjoyed other times in San Jose. During the Thanksgiving holidays, I got a chance to stay at the Japanese-American family to celebrate it. I did not know inside of turkey has the stuffing and cooking together brought us such a fantastic conversation. Also, I learned that not many people agreed with the history of Thanksgiving Day, and indigenous people celebrated their own Thanksgiving day. **I got many perspectives in the United States, which I cannot learn from just traveling here.**





Turnerlyne Blackhair
Waseda University (from Fort Lewis College)

I had always dreamed of being able to travel to Japan and experience the culture first hand. I learned a lot during my time abroad. **I will admit that studying in Tokyo was the hardest challenge I had yet.** I learned a lot about Japanese culture and communications. I have a lot of enjoyable moments I like to remember. It was a major change having the classes spaced out and for so long. I also did not expect the work culture environment to be at Waseda University. It was common for there to be so many events on campus the first week of class in the United States compared to Japan.

One of the biggest takeaways I have from this experience is personal growth. I thought I was not doing enough. My first year of University was dramatically different from my second year. In many ways, I felt the pressure of proving to myself I was able to do this. I felt that I failed when I was struggling with learning Japanese or the course work. I was not volunteering or joining clubs, due to the language barrier. I really felt I did not do what I set out to do. I felt I was letting down my family, school, and culture. **The pressure of representing the Navajo Nation only gets harder as you age. I did not feel I was the right choice. I did not think I should have been the one to represent the Navajo Nation.** I needed to redefine success.

Success changed for me in Japan. Success was being able to complete the lesson for today with little error. It became strengthening the bonds I already formed with others. Success was having a small conversation in Japanese with the cashier. I will always be appreciative of the Watanabe Scholars Weekend. When you are surrounded by such a nice community, things get easier. The weekend helped me connect with other scholars who had the same struggles. A lot of the struggles I faced were personal. I do not think I would have survived if I had to worry about the financial situation. I am grateful that was one struggle I did not have to face as bad as others.

The scholarship funded a life-long dream of mine. I feel very honored I was chosen. **It is a harsh reality but people with similar backgrounds like me do not get this chance. I would want more Native Americans to try for the scholarship. I want them to experience life beyond the reservation.**





Andrea Caviglia

Kansai University (from Northern Arizona University)

Despite the challenges of facing a pandemic in the middle of my study abroad, and therefore having to return to the US prematurely, **the 7 months I spent in Japan were truly life changing.** Academically speaking, of course, it was a unique experience that will surely set me apart from many others in my field, but it also provided me with the opportunity to take courses in subjects I otherwise wouldn't have been able to, such as Japanese linguistics. On a more personal level, I was also able to make friends from all around the world. I met a lot of Japanese people, naturally, but I also befriended other exchange students from several countries in Europe and Asia. In doing so, **I was able to learn about different cultures and viewpoints (especially from Japan, of course), and I expanded my worldview.**

The highlight of my study abroad experience was during Spring Break. I took the time first to travel to South Korea, and then upon returning to Japan I went all the way from Fukuoka to Tokyo before returning to Kansai. Until this point, I had mostly stayed around Osaka, so although I had been living in Japan for half a year, I experienced a lot of things I hadn't been able to before, like visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, staying at a ryokan, and watching a Shuni-e ceremony.

Living in Japan has made me much more confident and independent. **I'm generally a rather shy and anxious person, but in meeting so many new people, doing my best to speak Japanese, exploring places on my own, and embarrassing myself at all of the above, I feel that I've developed a much thicker skin.** Because of this, and because I enjoyed my time in the country so much, I'm inspired to travel abroad more in my life, when I can afford it. And, of course, I also want to return to Japan one day, especially since there are still a lot of things I wasn't able to do.





Ryan Charette

Kyoto University (from The University of Texas at Austin)

The opportunity to study abroad in Kyoto was a life changing experience for me. In Japan I was able to make excellent academic progress and established strong study routines and made strides in my knowledge of Japanese language and culture. However, I also grew greatly as a person in my time abroad. In my academics I was challenged to improve my independence and self-discipline, yes, but in my day-to-day life my worldview was constantly challenged as well.

Studying in Japan was difficult to be sure, but it's not an experience I'd give up for anything in the world. It took a while for me to find my stride and really form habits that would work in my new environment.

I pushed myself to my limit when I studied abroad, making sure I could get the most out of my opportunity to learn about Japan firsthand. But eventually I started to find a healthier balance, making sure I could get my chances to sightsee and truly witness Japan while I was there. Kyoto is a beautiful city with so much history that I started taking morning walks, during which I would simply wander around and visit any historical sites, shrines, or interesting attractions that I saw. This took me to many places that I had never heard of and would not have normally considered visiting.

One of my fondest memories of Japan was Kyoto University's November Festival. Circles and clubs spend all year preparing for it – some decide to make and sell food, others perform live music and dancing, and yet others come up with unique or eclectic performances. Everything was shockingly unique. In the span of only a couple days, I saw jump rope competitions, drag shows, traditional Scottish dances, and even cheeseburgers made using English muffins as buns. **None of these things were what I had ever expected to see while in Japan, and it helped to break my misconception that Japan was culturally homogenous.**

I would like to return to Japan someday with what I've learned, and I would also like to take this opportunity to share what I've learned with the reader. There's no right or wrong way to spend your time abroad. Stressing out over every little detail of what might go wrong isn't going to help you. **I loved my time in Japan, it was probably the best time of my life and so much went wrong while I was there.** I wasn't prepared for a typhoon or a global pandemic, yet both of these things hit hard while I was in Japan. If I was able to love my time there despite all of that, I'm sure you'll [future scholars] be fine, no matter what bumps you encounter along the way.





Lyssa Douglas

Nagoya Gakuin University (from the University of Memphis)

I started learning Japanese in high school and fell in love immediately. Soon I was deciding to be a teacher, a Japanese teacher in the United States. In order to adequately educate my future students, I needed to have first-hand experience of the culture and the language I would be teaching. **I went to Japan to fulfil a dream and jumpstart a career.**

My first few months in Japan were not easy. This was my first time out of my country, and I had never been that far away from my family for as long as I would be in Japan. Plus, I was super nervous, so communication was difficult as well. After getting through orientation and making a few friends, school began, and I was intimidated by all the Japanese students who were looking at me and not knowing what to do in my presence. Adding to that, my group of international students were the only foreigners in the entire city, so we were always being observed by someone.

I was able to travel during the spring break to Kyoto and Hiroshima. Both cities were breathtaking and marvelous. I was not expecting to be able to travel to Hiroshima, but when I was so close by being in Kyoto, I could not pass up the opportunity. The shrines in Kyoto and the National Peace Museum in Hiroshima were enough to bring me to my knees in awe and wonder. The history in Japan is so mesmerizing, especially for me coming from such a young country. Even in my city of Nagoya where Atsuta Palace was, I was able to witness 2,000 years of history in one place.

Studying abroad gave me the opportunity to broaden my horizons and set in stone my want and passion for teaching. I was able to understand why studying abroad is so important to the education of others. Participating in another's culture or way of life is crucial to truly respecting their views and lifestyles. Being in a new country for the first-time teaches responsibility and freedom like no other experience can. **I will forever be grateful to Mr. Watanabe for giving me the opportunity to live my dreams.**



With Mr. & Mrs. Watanabe, donors of the scholarship



Nathan Fleming

Kwansei Gakuin University (from Nebraska Wesleyan University)

I believe that the greatest impact of me studying abroad is how much it changed me as a person. As someone who deals with anxiety on a regular basis and finds comfort in the status quo, this program broke me out of that shell. I was able to go out frequently, meet new people, make new friends, and all while having a smile on my face. This experience helped me truly grow into myself as a person. Living on my own allowed me to grow myself and find my own way around life. **Since I've returned to the United States, I have felt more confident, positive, and open minded.** Not only that, but this experience has truly enforced what I want to do as my future career. I want to become an English teacher in Japan.

I have also really enjoyed being able to observe various cultural activities that were unique to Japan. I was able to observe two Danjiri Matsuri's which showed me not only the togetherness of Japanese citizens, but also pure, unadulterated fear of watching a small wooden building cleave a chunk off of a concrete building without being damaged. I was able to go to the Yuki Matsuri in Hokkaido with my family which showed me the stunning beauty of winter snow.

I am truly thankful to the Watanabe family, and the U.S.-Japan Council. If it wasn't for the generosity shown to me, I wouldn't have been able to greatly improve myself as a person. I don't believe that words would be able to express the depths of my gratitude, they would only pale in comparison to how I truly feel. So from the bottom of my heart, the bottom of my soul. Thank you, truly and dearly, thank you.





Malik Gover

Waseda University (from the University of California, Los Angeles)

This chance to study abroad has taught me invaluable lessons that I plan to carry and use throughout the rest of my academic career at UCLA as well as my future profession. **On a personal level I was able to broaden my viewpoint on various issues in my life.** I was able to learn so much from Japanese culture that will hopefully serve me well in whatever I do in the future. Academically, studying abroad at Waseda University taught me about punctuality, responsibility, and hard work. At Waseda University there were no excuses for showing up to class late, it was up to me to wake up on my own and make sure I got to class with all of my work done, which was assigned daily, unlike at UCLA. Having to ride the train for two hours just to get to school has changed my outlook on things.

One thing that I was able to do that I never anticipated was to meet the former Japan-US Ambassador, Fujisaki Ichiro through this scholarship. It was a great honor and pleasure to meet someone who has had such a profound impact on U.S.-Japan relations. Studying abroad has inspired me to reach out more to various internships and jobs, especially those involved with U.S.-Japan relations. I would like to get more involved in this space and see what opportunities it can lead to. This opportunity has made me even more focused and determined to work and hopefully improve the relations between the U.S. and Japan.

My biggest suggestion to those who are preparing for their time in Japan, would be to expect the unexpected. You are going to be in a completely different world and out of your comfort zone, so it is important to just roll with the punches and not get down on yourself. You are going to make mistakes, and that is ok! **Being a Watanabe Scholar has meant so much to me. I was able to live out my dream by studying abroad in one the most unique countries in the world.** Hopefully, I can use these tools and lessons the Watanabe Scholarship has bestowed upon me and use it to further improve not only U.S.-Japan, but global relations.



With Mr. Watanabe, donor of the scholarship





Mei Hamaguchi
Georgia State University
(from Tokyo Metropolitan Shoyo High School)

It had been an incredible eight-month studying abroad experience in the U.S., which I would not have been able to get without the financial help from Toshizo Watanabe Scholarship. Studying at Perimeter College of Georgia State University has been challenging but worthwhile and enjoyable at the same time.

To begin with, my self-confidence has improved considerably by studying at an American college. Discussions happen more frequently, and students need to have their own opinions or ideas to participate in the class. Many classmates can make a point with solid reasons very quickly. Meanwhile, I was not confident enough to speak up. But after one month passed, I finally decided to give my opinion in the class, which was successful. And I got confidence in myself, and I am not afraid to speak up and have been joining the discussion proactively since then.

Moreover, studying abroad made my pathway clearer. When I arrived in the U.S., I knew that I wanted to learn the environment and sustainability; I started volunteering activities related to the environment, such as park conservancy, recycling center, planting, etc. I have met many people that have the same ambition as me for environmental problems, including those already working in the environmental protection field. **Talking with them made me realize that I do not have to rush to find my future my goal yet, but I should try to narrow the interest.**

Also, I have gained many skills. Firstly, my writing skill improved significantly, as I had to write many essays or research projects. Secondly, I have developed critical thinking, an ability to analyze information objectively and form a judgment, through the discussions in class. I also gained communication skills, leadership, teamwork, time management, etc., all of which are essential to success in the future as well as in college.

Being a Watanabe Scholar has been such an honor to me, and I appreciate the opportunity as much that words cannot express. **Whenever I lack confidence in myself or face a problem, I remember that I was chosen to be a Watanabe Scholar.** Although the scholarship term is over, I will keep the honor in my heart, study hard, and experience multiple things. And I will succeed in the future so that I can return a favor to Mr. and Mrs. Watanabe, Ms. Fisher, Ms. Kim, and all other people who have supported me with studying abroad.





Nagisa Isoyama

California State University - San Marcos (from Japan Women's University)

I lived in on campus with seven roommates. At the beginning of my studies abroad, I could not communicate with them very well. However, I got to know them inside out and we were able to warm up to each other gradually. **I felt that I could make friends despite the language barrier and this surprise birthday party proved that the friendship was genuine.** For me, they were my first friends abroad and are still important friends. Being able to make friends overseas in this way has led me to grow in confidence, and I felt that I was able to achieve cross-cultural communication, which was my goal.

Second, I volunteered with my friends at a Japanese language school in San Diego for two months. When I thought about what I could do here in the US, I found an ad looking for Japanese language school volunteers, so I applied. At first, some children were always talking in English and I saw a few who weren't the right fit for the class. I remembered that I used to like doing Cat's Cradle (*ayatori* in Japanese) with a teacher when I was a child, so I tried to teach it to them. They then got interested in it and I was able to communicate with them in Japanese. It is tough for them to go to school every Saturday to learn Japanese even though they all live in the US. However, they worked really hard and every time they saw me, they always said "good morning" to me with a smile. I am very proud of them and I miss them already. **Most of them may not use Japanese for the rest of their lives but I hope they remember what they learned there, even if just a little bit.**

Being a Watanabe scholar made me understand the importance of the US-Japan relationship and expanded my possibilities. I am honored to have been selected as a recipient of the U.S.-Japan Council Toshizo Watanabe Scholarship for 2019-2020. My advice for future scholars is to learn one's own culture as much as possible before studying abroad and to be able to explain it in English.



On my 21st birthday



Thank you card from Japanese language school students



Kanako Kimura

Tufts University (from Toyo University)

The chance I gained to study abroad, which was enabled by the Watanabe Scholarship, has meant to be both personally and academically strengthening my confidence; the experience has given me the higher education status and also directly have linked to my career progress. **This summer I gained the chance to work with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, and I supported the High Representative Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu to attend the Peace Ceremony in Hiroshima and Nagasaki Prefecture for commemorating peace and nuclear abolition.** This experience is very rare since the intern normally cannot do any of the business travels or attend the High Representative for business. However, amid of such occasion of the COVID-19 where the UN strictly restricts the minimum level of business travels to all employees, the chance came to me as I was based in Japan during the summer. Throughout the two weeks I managed all logistic details of her meetings, and by the end of the term Ms. Nakamitsu trusted me for the job.

The chance of advancing my study had tremendously impacted on my academic and personal credibility. My past academic status of being a graduate of Toyo University, which is low to medium level in the Japanese university ranking, was no longer effective for representing myself. Now, I have been viewed as a Japanese graduate student who is studying international relations in Boston, USA, at a reputational school. **Furthermore, as a Watanabe Scholar, I publicly gained another society responsibility where I can represent myself as someone who understands the U.S.-Japan related community.**

The second chance of studying abroad has been very different from the experience I gained when I was 19 years old in Jonesboro, Arkansas. In Arkansas, I mostly hanged out with the international students who were also studying abroad for their first time. At Fletcher, most of the students have the international experiences and I would say they are very global. I mostly hanged out with the American students and Japanese students, and almost all the time at Fletcher I spend my whole time for career and academics.



Holiday party with friends



With Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, undersecretary-general and high representative for disarmament affairs



Hideyuki Komaki

University of Washington (degree-seeking)

In 2018, I have decided to quit my previous school, Keio University, and transfer to the University of Washington to pursue a computer science degree instead of a business degree. It was right after finishing the study abroad at the University of Washington in 2017-2018 under the support of the Watanabe scholarship. At that time, I was close to graduate my school and I also had the return offers from a couple of companies. I needed to throw away all of them to pursue this plan, but I didn't care that much since it is much more important for me to pursue how to translate cutting-edge technology into a valuable product that helps people's lives. This passion made me keep motivating and connecting with many people.

Last September, my heart was filled with excitement since I could go back to the UW and start working with talented people from all over the world in the computer science field. However, studying at UW as a computer science major was much more challenging than I expected. I could easily catch up on the lecture since I have already spent almost one year in the previous study abroad, but at this time, I realized that there are huge gaps in skill between me and other classmates. It made me feel conflicted if I should not come to here.

Along with the study, I attended multiple career fairs to find the summer 2020 internship. Hundreds of students waited in line for more than an hour to talk with recruiters, but we had only five minutes to pitch ourselves. While everyone spoke with confidence, I was worried if I really have my strong point. When I talked with a man from a famous cloud-based software company, he asked me what kind of engineering fields I was interested in. I am pretty sure my explanation was very poor because I was nervous about taking myself, but I explained how I am passionate about security and that is why I came to the U.S., going so far as to quit my previous university. I didn't know the exact reason but, somehow he looked happy. From this moment, I felt slightly confident. (I didn't know at the time that he will be my manager a half year later). I could also eventually quit comparing myself to other people and start focusing on measuring my growth. Because of this experience, I could network with many people at the USJC annual conference last year and get motivated by them. I was really surprised that I was born in Watanabe-san's hometown and he had a connection with my grand family.

Now, I am thinking that I would like to stay here more than going back to Japan. Sometimes I felt I might not be able to survive alone in this unpredictable world and wanted to be in the comfort zone, but when I look back the past year, I could make small progress even though I encountered difficulties. And it is because a lot of people are always supporting me in various ways even if they are physically far apart. I will say a huge thank you to my family, friends, teachers, teammates, mentor, manager, and the Watanabe scholarship which gave me this opportunity even in this hard time.





Margaret Kriebel

Waseda University (from Ohio Wesleyan University)

Although I decided to return from my study abroad program a semester earlier than what I originally planned, I am extremely grateful that I was given the opportunity to have the experience that I did. My time in Japan opened doors to new social experiences, assisted and changed my future career and educational prospects, and allowed me to appreciate my home country in a way I was never able to do before this first trip I have ever taken abroad.

I studied at Waseda University in Tokyo, and I took academic classes within the School of International Liberal Studies department and language classes within the Center for Japanese Language department.

I found the classes in SILS to be poorly taught and executed, and I heard such complaints several times from both friends and random strangers as I walked about campus. The CJL were rigorous but ineffective, largely because of how quickly material was taught, and how little review was given.

Outside of classes, I lived in Nakano with my host mother. It was just me, her, and the cat in the apartment. Even though we could not speak to each other well, I really appreciated the effort she put into being a good host parent and her generosity.

Again, I must say that my time in Japan is something I will look upon in the future positively. I originally wanted to work in Japanese translation and perhaps even live in Japan one day. Now that I have the experience, I know that I would not have been happy pursuing this path. The idea of encountering new things is something that I look forward to with determination and rigor that I did not have before Japan.





Tomoaki Kurita

University of Hawaii, Manoa (from Tohoku University)

As I originally planned, my one semester in Hawaii had been devoted to improving my understanding of international politics in East Asia. In my courses, I learned theoretical perspectives and various case studies to understand international security in East Asia and Chinese politics. I wrote a 30-page final paper in total, as the first draft of my undergraduate thesis. The professor who taught me the comparative politics and one of the Chinese politics courses liked my submitted papers in the class and recommended me to attend good graduate schools in the future. **Moreover, she offered to publish my paper somewhere at the end of the semester.** I am still not quite sure where this fantastic offer will go, but it was my honor to know she evaluates my paper so high.

The paper and my improved theoretical and case understandings are significant achievements in my academic field. I made friends in the classroom, club activities and the International Students Association. One friend was a 56-year-old, 3rd generation Nikkei, retired Army soldier and a police officer. We initially had conversation sessions and I helped his Japanese class test preparations. As we know each other, he taught me about his experience in the military and the leadership he learned in the army and the police. The session transformed from language exchange to a leadership seminar. I learned a lot from him.

This study opportunity developed my academic ability from just understanding to view international affairs through my lens, have opinions based on my original logic. I highly appreciate Mr. Watanabe and your committee. Without your support, I could not achieve my goals. In my future, I would like to express my appreciation by contributing to the future of the US-Japan alliance and relations in terms of defense, diplomacy, or any other fields.



With USJC members in Hawaii





Jacalyn Li

International Christian University (from University of California San Diego)

Studying at ICU was very different from studying at my home university, University of California San Diego (UCSD). **Because of my time spent at ICU, I now have more options in terms of academic pursuits and career objectives.** Currently, my major is computer engineering, and my career plan is to become a software engineer. I still love computer engineering, but I would also like to explore Japanese-English interpreting as a career path, possibly as an in-house interpreter for a tech company.

In addition to academics, I also had the opportunity to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities. I was involved in language exchange programs back at UCSD as well, so it was interesting to experience the same type of activity at ICU. I also had the unexpected opportunity to volunteer in Nagano to assist with the typhoon relief efforts after Typhoon No.19. **Because of this experience, I want to learn more about disaster prevention and ways that I can use my specialty of computer engineering to improve the current system.**

After winter break, I am very excited to get back to my computer engineering classes next semester. I am also excited for my Japanese courses. Before studying abroad, I was frustrated because my Japanese was not improving. However, because of my study abroad experience, my new goal is to become an interpreter, so I was able to find a lot of room for improvement in my Japanese. **It is not an exaggeration to say that having the chance to study abroad has changed the course of my life plans.** Personally, I was able to test out my Japanese skills, how independent I could become, and daily life in Japan.

Editor's note: Jacalyn's reflection was featured on the [USJC website](#).



While volunteering in Nagano



De'Jia Long-Hillie

Nanzan University (from University of Maryland)

During my semester abroad, I kept myself busy with several extracurricular activities. I participated in a cooking club where I learned how to make Japanese food, and I also volunteered at a basketball club for elementary school students in the countryside. As for my classes, it was amazing to see the things we learned about in class in real life. Seeing the various rites of passage at shins and the mundane mannerisms of Japanese people was fascinating.

Study abroad has allowed me to grow in ways I am not sure I would have otherwise. I take personal growth very seriously, so I was able to do some real self-reflection and pinpoint problem areas in my personality that I needed to work on. I crave self-growth and enhancement, so I pushed forward with self-improvement as my goal. I know going into my last semester in America that I have changed on a fundamental level, and these changes have strengthened my leadership abilities, tested my patience, and introduced me to alternative problem-solving strategies.

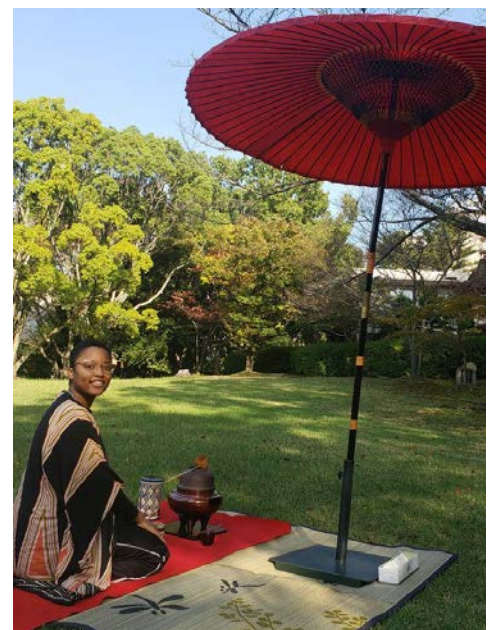
One thing I had a chance to do that I never expected was having the opportunity to volunteer and participate in a conference specifically for black women in Japan. I was surrounded by phenomenal black women doing phenomenal things in Japan. **I am inspired to do equally phenomenal things in my future.**

Being a Watanabe scholar has meant I get to experience Japan and study abroad as a normal student. Not “the student who always works”, or “the student who always worries”. For once, I was able to just be a curious student. I haven’t felt this way since kindergarten. The world was my oyster. I will always appreciate the organization that helped me realize my dream.

Editor’s note: De’Jia participated in the Instagram takeover to share her story and experience in the U.S.-Japan & international field ([post 1](#), [post 2](#), [post 3](#), [post 4](#), [post 5](#)). Her reflection was also featured on the [USJC website](#).



With staff and volunteers of the Black Women in Japan Convention





Madison Mahaffey
Waseda University (from Colorado College)

As the end of 2019 and the fall term approaches, I realize how fast my time in Japan has gone by. Before the start of the school year, as I would tell friends and family, I would be spending seven months in Japan, it honestly seemed like an unreasonably long time. To briefly speak on my academic life in Japan: I chose to take a nearly full course load, 19 out of 21 credits, because not only did I not have the luxury to waste this opportunity, but because I wanted to take full advantage of studying in a foreign country.

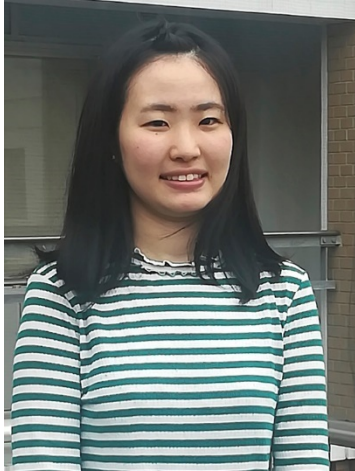
Regardless of the topic of the class, it is inherently structured in and around Japan. To be able to have a different starting point, a foundation in a different country and culture that is inherently different from America is truly enlightening. The viewpoint has shifted, and it is interesting to see how certain things change or remain the same.

This new viewpoint, new foundation, does not just apply to academics. Personally, it has made me aware of the kind of life I want to live; simply, kindly, and impactfully. **All experience is good experience, and I know this time in my life will play a major role in my life moving forward.** My time in Japan has been spent living with a host family. My relationship with the family was certainly something I hoped for but never expected. I am so utterly blessed to have been placed with this family, and I truly hope that our relationship will continue even after I return to the States.

This study abroad experience has shown me that I do wish to return, hopefully in a position that is more permanent. **My journey with Japan certainly does not stop here.**

Editor's note: Madison's reflection was featured on the [USJC website](#).





Mana Makinae

University of Washington (from Kobe University)

The chance to study abroad means a lot to me. The decision studying abroad was one of the best decisions that I've made. The best thing in my study abroad was that I could meet amazing talented people. If I did not do study abroad, I would not have a chance to meet them. Each person inspired me a lot, and they are role model to me now. I want to be a person who could inspire others.

One thing that was unexpected that I experienced was that I stayed at Yuko Watanabe's (USJC member) house during winter break and this was one of the best things that I've encountered. I learned so many things from her and keep learning from her. The relationship was not just one-time host-mother and invited-student relationship. Even after I left her home, she kept supporting me, especially networking. She helped me how to do networking which I was not good at. Thanks to her, I had opportunity to meet other U.S.- Japan Council members outside of the Los Angeles conference. I met Ayumi Nagata, USJC Regional Manager who is in charge of L.A. region, Daniel Higa, Kohei Okimuro and Kenneth Barron. I think I could make my U.S. network bigger and learned how to do networking. I keep touch with her and continue this precious bond.

During the winter break, I traveled with my friend who was an exchange student from China. What made this travel unusual was that we decided to use Greyhound for main transportation to move cities to cities. The longest travel we did was from Washington D.C. to Las Vegas, and it took almost three days. It was not comfortable, and I'll never do the same thing again. However, it was great opportunity to cross from the East to the West to see landscape changes.

I met so many people during my study abroad period and learned there are as many answers as there are people. Especially in Japan where the society is relatively homogeneous, there are always certain paths that people are marching to and it is too scare to walk out of the path. Before I went to the U.S., I always looked for certain answers trying not to off the road. Whether it was for education or career, I tried to fit in the certain path. However, I realized that there is no certain path because everyone is different. Each person that I met during my study abroad have different stories. Every story was too unique to compare. I realized there is no need to compare to others because everything is too different to compare. **I stopped comparing myself to ideal paths that the society has.**



With Yuko Watanabe's family while home staying with them in Seattle





Jenna McKee-Bakos

Meiji Gakuin University (from University of California, Santa Barbara)

While abroad in Japan, I did not participate in many extra-curricular activities since I came in the middle of the year and instead mostly focused on my academics. One thing that I did do outside of the classroom was work for my school's International Center as an International Lunch Liaison. My job consisted of talking to students who were learning English or who were interested in studying abroad in America.

Studying abroad has been a truly invaluable experience for me. Not only did I have many great personal experiences and had opportunities to further my professional development, but I also developed a lot as a person. I have never traveled outside my own country before, so deciding to go to a whole new country that does not even speak my language, not just to visit but to study and live in, was a big decision. **I do not think I have ever truly challenged myself until I went to Japan.** I interacted with such diverse groups of people, who have diverse opinions and beliefs that I have never heard before. I went to places that previously I could have only dreamed of. I really think that traveling and studying in Japan made me mature as a person in ways I could have only imagined. **Studying in Japan has really solidified my love for international relations and travel,** and I feel much more comfortable pursuing international and global policy as an occupation because of the experiences I had while abroad.

My time in Japan went by so fast, and it was such an amazing, humbling experience that I will never forget. I think it is important to take advantage of every opportunity presented to you in Japan and not be afraid, especially of trying something new.





Naomi Moore

Temple University, Japan Campus (from Seattle Central College)

As I reflect on the completion of my first year in Japan, it is difficult to pinpoint the most transformative aspects of this experience. Personally, I have grown to be more adaptable, honest, self-trusting, courageous, curious, vulnerable, and disciplined. When I first came to Japan, I started in a homestay experience with a bubbly, quirky native-Japanese single mother and her son, who worked as a DJ in Shibuya. The mix of social elements between our small-town community, the son's close friends, and my cross-cultural university allowed me to connect with so many more different kinds of people than I was used to. It was a great challenge to learn how to trust in my own sense of self and connect across so many differences in background, personality, and culture. **My life entirely changed, and though I oftentimes felt nervous or inadequate to navigate the discomfort in adjusting to a new country, I discovered that my perseverance and flexibility were far more powerful than I had imagined.**

In my Spring semester, I had my first internship, among other things. I worked at the Tokyo English Lifeline, or TELL, one of the few mental health organizations dedicated to serving the broad international community in Tokyo. It was a true privilege to meet and work with the clinicians and office staff who are committed to breaking the stigma around mental health in Japan.

In my final words, I wish to thank the Watanabe Scholarship and the U.S.-Japan Council once again for presenting an opportunity that was beyond what I could have hoped for. It transformed my relationship with myself, my studies, and the world around me. **I am more grateful, open-minded, patient, and honest as a result of this study abroad.**





Seri Morikawa

Brown University (from Keio University)

Studying at Brown University was doubtlessly meaningful for me since I could fulfill my academic curiosities which I would not have been conscious of if I had stayed in Japan. The experiences of taking classes such as a political science seminar focusing on populism and a class of visual arts on the study of postmodernism have made me realized the fact that I show deep interests towards the human communication.

Thanks to these classes I took at Brown University, I could finally realize my own curiosity in seeking communication. Studying at Brown has definitely pushed me to chase my real interests, which could not have been attained if I had chosen to study in Japan and pursue my major, International Relations. As for the job after graduation, I will work at an advertising company in Japan called Hakuhodo to contribute to enriching the communication between people and companies since I feel doomed to stick to my own interests which I could clarify during my study abroad.

In regards to what it means to be a Watanabe scholar at USJC, I feel the greatest and deepest appreciation for your continued support of my study abroad program. **Without your financial support, I would have not been able to create the path to future on my own in the United States.** Studying apart from the home university has made me noticed how important it is to be exposed to different style of education, various groups of people and culture. It has opened up the scope on my future in a vaster and more positive way as I could feel what I had seen or heard in Japan was not everything, especially when it comes to finding my academic interests or job hunting.





Ayano Nakamura
Bates College (degree-seeking)

During my first year at Bates, I was overwhelmed by professors giving us hundreds of readings to read for the next class which I was not able to keep up. Without reading efficiently, class-discussions became a nightmare. I often felt overwhelmed by the rapid pace of the high-quality class-discussions and not being able to contribute whatsoever. As I got the support from my professors and friends around me, I was able to get back on track and got full points for all my classes on participation points for all of my classes. All my professors gave me very kind words, and I felt extremely grateful to be in an environment where I know I have a supportive community by my side.

When I was looking for clubs to join, I knew I wanted to join a business club to learn more about business in a fun and reachable way. However, I could not find any business-related clubs, adding on to the fact that Bates did not offer any business courses. **Therefore, I co-founded “Women in Business” with three other female students.** I also auditioned for an Acapella group, which gave me an opportunity to get to know students from different grades but with the same interest in singing. Additionally, I joined the “Chase Hall Programming Board” where we would plan amusing events for the student body. **Extracurricular activities at Bates allowed me to find new passion and diverse group of friends.**

In the second semester, I started enjoying Bates to the fullest. I made many good friends during this term too, who I would even have late night deep conversations with. I was able to balance my social life and my academic life well and finally felt at home. I learned that especially in the beginning, every student has somewhat of a difficulty transitioning to college life from high school life whether it could be big or small problems.

Not only the scholarship provided me with financial assistance, but it gave me a supportive community where I can rely on. I have peers that is going through the same hardship of navigating myself into US institution as a Japanese student. With Watanabe scholarship, I am not alone. **I do not know in which way yet, but I know for a fact that in the future, I want to be an advocate who can bring the two countries closer.**





Kinami Nakaza

Berklee College of Music (degree-seeking)

The 2019-2020 academic year was my senior year at Berklee College of Music. Coming into my last year, I wanted to focus on booking gigs that would outline my artistic career instead of taking part in other people's projects that would take a large portion of my time. I find joy in producing shows because initial ideas, themes and visions are impalpable, but overtime these things translate to tangible visuals and expressions on people's faces. In the fall semester, I even had an opportunity to perform at a nation-wide venue, The House of Blues, but unfortunately the event was cancelled last minute. Although that did not go as expected, I felt humbled and honored to have been recognized to have the talent to perform at such a venue. My mother has

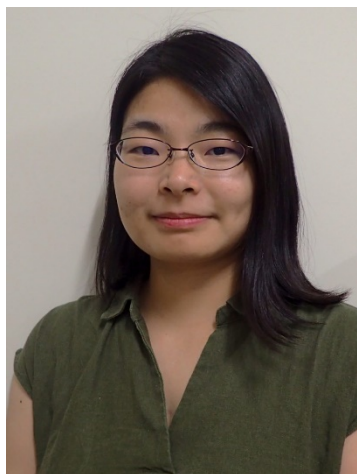
always told me to do my best even when no one is watching, and I believe living by that motto has helped me make genuine connections with people which has led me to great opportunities!

My final semester at Berklee was cut short due to Covid-19, but the moments I have experienced in 2020 have been splendid. I was able to land on a lead role in a show at the school's biggest venue lead by Rob Lewis, a Berklee alumni that is Christina Aguilera's current musical director. **Something about it being my last year pushed me further to believe in my ability to secure lead positions, an internship, a 4.0 GPA and a healthy relationship with my mind and body.** Although this is an ongoing challenge, the fact that I will not be in school anymore gave me a final push to finish strong. As a final spark, I was even able to sing in the commencement concert that honored artists such as John Legend, Cassandra Wilson, Sheila E, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and André De Shields. The performance was virtual, but the feeling of one-ness despite the pandemic was such a moving experience.

I believe that graduating from a prestigious music college in the US was the best decision I have made for my career. I have realized that it is all about trying something. **If I had not tried to attend this school and challenge myself, I would not have accumulated great experiences and skills I have today.** If my mom had given up on the financial challenges it would take to put me through school, I would not have been able to get a degree. I have learned that setting my mind to something and truly believing in success manifests success. The trials and tribulations are inevitable, but just make me stronger! Going to college in the U.S. is a once in a lifetime experience and a bridge to the rest of the world.

My deepest gratitude goes to the USJC, the founders of the Watanabe Scholarship and the Watanabe family. I am so humbled to know that a community of people believe in my purpose and dream as much as I do. I will continue to pursue my artistic career as an ambassador of Japanese American relations, a representation of Japan here in the US and be an artistic activist in change to make this world a better place!





Kazuyo Nishihara

University of California, Berkeley (degree-seeking graduate student)

Although the 2019-2020 academic year was totally unpredictable, I am positive that what I have learned from this experience is irreplaceable. The most profound lesson I have learned is that I have learned this academic year was that people can be thoughtful and help one other during difficult times.

In the 2020 spring semester, I attended four classes, including two lectures and two grad-student seminars. The lectures were directly related to my research interest. It helps me consider the difference of archaeological history between North America, especially in California, and Japan. Unlike a usual year, the spring semester in 2020 turned into all online classes from the middle of March due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the US. My campus life was shut down with one day notice on March 16th, and everything went online, including interactions with my friends, classmates, and laboratory coworkers. The classes I took in the 2020 spring semester were limited in size, so I had time to talk with professors and classmates online. Through Zoom classes, I could tell how the other classmates felt and how they coped with the situation. And technically, compared to in-person classes, it was easier for me to listen and focus on what other people were talking about because everyone paused a few seconds before starting to talk, so the conversation speed was slower than usual.

Since the coming several years will likely be similarly unforeseeable, what I would like to emphasize to new scholars is this: please ask others for help when you are having a difficult time, and not hesitate to open up your feelings and thoughts. The people you can share how you feel are not necessarily friends or classmates. They might be your supervisor, other international scholars, housemates, or counselor. I came as a visiting student and found it challenging to open up to someone about my deep feelings because everyone in graduate school is busy. I am lucky enough to have good friends and a counselor, but before that, it took me one whole semester to admit that I was depressed and needed to ask for help. Once I was able to ask for the help, I needed taking a rest, medication care for a while, and mostly, talking and sharing my feelings even if it is not clear.





Hina Onishi

Temple University (from Temple University Japan)

For the first semester, it took time for me to get accustomed to the life in the U.S. For instance, I faced various kinds of problems from unpunctual trains to racial discrimination. I lived in an international house, so I met many international students from China, Korea, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, etc.. That experience was really meaningful to me because people having totally different backgrounds came to study English, so we could feel free to communicate and share our own backgrounds, and it was comfortable for me rather than talking to native speakers.

As extracurricular activities, I joined Japanese culture club in a different university and in the district, and I interacted with other students.

Academically, I took five classes, but one of the classes, law enforcement class left a strong impression on my mind. That was the course that teaches us American police force, and how it implements its safety measures. That was not a requirement course, but I had a strong curiosity about it because the area around Temple University is known for a dangerous place, and I wanted to know how police deal with problems, such as drugs, guns etc. Also, in the second semester, I took some economics classes, and I learned poverty matters. **In Japan, “poverty” is not easily visible hard to see the reality, but in the U.S. I often saw homeless people, and what I learned in the class was, poverty brings further poverty and is inherited generation to generation.** This fact reminded me of the significance of the scholarship. Even though I grew up in a happy home environment, without this Watanabe scholarship, I would not be able to study in the U.S., so I really appreciate Mr. Watanabe and U.S. Japan council for giving me such a great opportunity.

One of the themes I set was communication and interaction to broaden my horizons as well as to improve my English ability. I mainly communicated with international students in the first semester, but I got used to the life in the U.S. ,and in the second semester I got more opportunities to interact with English native speakers by living in an off-campus dorm. I lived with 3 other roommates, who are all Americans. They were really kind enough to teach me the rule of the room, school things, events etc., and sometimes we had lunch together. **The period of an academic year was shorter than I expected, so I will advise future scholars not to waste of their time and start talking to somebody.**





Cesar David Palacios Orihuela
Tokyo International University (degree-seeking)

The fall semester of 2019 was my last semester of university and it was full of many rewarding experiences and challenges. I decided to continue the Student Leadership Internship (SLI) with my university to support international students on their new lives in Japan by assisting them with a variety of tasks such as accompanying them to city hall, helping them rent an apartment or even taking them to the hospital. In addition to all of the usual responsibilities that come along with the position, this time around I had a leadership role, which meant I had to help in preparing new peer assistants who joined the internship.

Since it was my last semester, I felt compelled to challenge my Japanese language skills by registering for a Marketing course that is taught fully in Japanese. The course proved to be a lot harder than I initially thought because even though I felt familiar and comfortable with everyday conversations, it is totally different when having to use that language in an academic environment where you are continuously introduced to new more technical vocabulary. It was a surreal experience writing and submitting reports, taking tests, and doing homework all completely in Japanese.

As for the other classes I took, one that really stood out to me was a debate class designed for students from both the English program and the Japanese program. We had several debates on topics that ranged from income inequality, gender discrimination in the workplace, organized crime and other Japanese social issues. **What I really enjoyed about this class was the opportunity to hear the opinions of students who under most circumstances would not speak up, but in this class they had to because it was part of the curriculum and necessary for them to pass the class.**

In the midst of everything mentioned above, “Sports Day”, a special event my university holds once a year to promote teamwork and physical activity came and as part of the SLI program I helped organize and lead the event. All students attending were divided into teams, each represented by a color. As the leader of the red team, I did not want to disappoint the members of my team, and even if we were to lose, I wanted to make sure that we gave it our best and finished the day with no regrets.





Ayano Sato

Teachers College, Columbia University (degree-seeking graduate student)

As a graduate degree student in the Arts Administration Program at Columbia University I took three compulsory and two elective courses in the fall semester. In compulsory courses, I gained a preliminary understanding of the organizational and institutional process by which arts took shape in the United States, and how to organize fundraising. Additionally, I acquired an understanding of the core principles of philanthropy and approaches to fundraising in the arts. I developed not only academic knowledge but also practical skills in arts; for instance, grant/sponsorship proposals and writing fundraising materials, including basic fundraising research.

From next spring semester, I will start taking classes in marketing courses in Business school at Columbia University, in addition to the courses for my thesis of my program. Additionally, I got an (unpaid) internship position in the performing arts department of the Japan Society in New York. **Through the internship opportunity, I have a chance to see the nuts and bolts behind international collaborative projects between artists in the U.S. and Japan, as well as a close look at how to program and promote events in performing arts in New York City.**

Despite living in New York City, I rarely had a chance to visit the performing/visual arts venue and other arts organizations in this city because it took so much time for preparing courses, assignments for my graduate school, and applying for the internship of arts organizations.





Hiromichi Takahashi

Maryville University (from Tokyo International University)

At first, I thought that studying abroad was all about a new lifestyle and for improving my English skills. However, I was wrong. I have experienced many unexpected things, but I would say that those happenings made me stronger and brave enough to live away from my family. I was doing well for the first half of my study abroad program then I started to get depressed sometimes for feeling lonely. That is when my mom recommended me to start cooking. She shared her recipes with me so that I will be able to remember the taste of me a lot from being homesick and had also changed my life completely. I had a shy personality and making friends was not easy for me. However, cooking in the dorm often became a new tool for me communicating with new people. It made it easier to start a conversation, and because of it, I was able to meet more new friends during the spring semester than before. My friends and I started to cook every day since the cafeteria was closed, and it definitely made our bond stronger. Despite the stressful days during the pandemic, it became one of the most memorable moments during my spring semester.

I have also challenged myself to try a new area of study in my last semester at Maryville College. I was mainly focusing on International Relations and English courses before, but I also decided to take International Business as well as Economics. Before studying abroad, my life goal at that time was to experience living in the U.S. and attending college classes there. That was the first thing that always comes to my mind which was bothering me to make a clear decision with my future career. However, with the opportunity given by the Watanabe Scholarship, I was able to move on and start planning my future path after college graduation. I have been dreaming of being a flight attendant and after doing some research, my goal now has changed into being a “purser” which is a higher position job for being in charge of the whole aircraft and managing the other crew members.

After finishing my full-year program in the U.S. I am now proud to say that I have grown a lot, and it also gave me so much confidence to communicate with my English. **Spending time in the U.S. has changed not only my perspectives but also what I really want to do with my life in the future; in other words, it was a life-changing experience.** The U.S. had more diversity compared to Japan which taught me how to appreciate other cultures and also getting over cultural barriers. Exploring several states during my break, I was able to meet many new people. I always kept in my mind the saying “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”. That experience made me a person who could think of someone’s current situation and not judging at first without knowing their background whenever I am talking to someone.

For the future Watanabe Scholars, do not forget that being chosen is a once in a lifetime experience, and being a student at a young age will never happen again. **Do not fear or hesitate to try and challenge yourself because it will just cause you to regret your decisions in the future.** You will also have an important role as being a bridge between the U.S. and Japan so think of it as a privilege you can have the experience that other people could not.





Aoi Tani

University of Nevada, Reno (from Meiji University)

In this spring semester, I took the virtual reality class, the orchestra class, the theatre class, and so on. I was keeping working very hard, because most of the classes are for senior. Especially in the virtual reality class and orchestra class, I had precious experiences. **For the midterm of the virtual reality class, I studied with friends for the first time. It was so helpful because I was able to notice what I did not understand, and I was able to study deeply while teaching them in English to my friends.** In addition to that, we had some discussions for the group project of a virtual reality application. Thanks to my experience of the fall semester, I could suggest my own opinion clearly. In terms of the orchestra class, it was the hardest challenge for me. Because I had experiences of joining brass bands, but it was my first time to join an orchestra. Luckily, I passed the audition and I got my confidence with other players' and teacher's help. The concert I joined in the United States was one of my precious memories. I was very glad to make music with them.

During this study abroad in the United States, I was supported by many friends. I felt really lonely when I came to the University of Nevada, Reno for the first time. Due to the stress, I got chronic fever. Without my friends, I would not have survived the university life. Especially with my roommate, I had a good friendship. We had big problems each other, but we got over them together. I had a health problem and she had a mental illness. **We did not extinguish our smile. And I challenged new thing with my friend.** Getting a driver's license was one of my things that I listed on my to do list during study abroad. It was scary to drive a car since that was my first time to drive. **I learned many things from these experiences; the importance of asking for help whenever I need and there is no need to use complicated English to enjoy university life with friends.**

Through this school year, I met many people whom I wish to keep in touch and learned importance of asking help, judgment skill, and gathering information. I will keep studying English in Japan and get ready to get another chance in the future. **I appreciate that the Watanabe Scholarship gave me the opportunity to learn things that I can utilize forever and meet many people who have their own dreams.**





Yosuke Tomizu

University of Mississippi (from Waseda University)

For the first semester, I took 4 classes, business presentation, criminal justice, business law, and sports business class. I was overwhelmed in the first class because of the atmosphere. Although almost all classes are conducted in English at Waseda and I thought I could handle classes in the U.S., everything that happened in the classes was different from that in Japan. Both professors and students were much more active in the classes and their southern accent and speed were not easy to understand at first. Also, in most classes, I was an only Asian student. One of the main reasons for studying abroad in the U.S. is to study sports business which is not a major academic subject in Japan. I took an introductory sports business course in the fall semester and I was surprised by the volume of the content. It took only two days to finish what I learned about the subject in Japan. However, I would choose the business law class as the most challenging class in the first semester. Although I knew the fact after several weeks passed, the business law class was very challenging even for native speakers. Every after classes, I visited the office hour and asked many questions.

In November, I visited Boston to participate in the Boston Career Forum. After spending three months in Mississippi, Boston was like a different country, and I saw the diversity in the city. At the forum, I met many friends and discussed our potential career.

After spending three days in Boston, I flew to Los Angeles to participate in the USJC Annual Conference. From the first day to the last day, there were many exciting and new things for me, and I spent an unforgettable time in LA. I met all scholars and all of them have their own dream and motivation for studying abroad. I had a great opportunity to talk with global leaders both Japanese and American. By seeing the vast networking of USJC, I learned how important it is to have a network for the future. I was highly motivated by listening to their career path and thoughts. **It was really nice to talk and tell my great appreciation to Mr. Watanabe. I will never forget these three valuable days and this experience gave me much confidence and dream that I will become a global leader someday.** On the airplane to Memphis, I promised myself that I will give maximum effort to what I will do.



At the 2019 USJC Annual Conference, with Bobby Webster





Keito Toyama

The College of William and Mary (from Keio University)

It had been my dream to study abroad in America and experience its culture since I was in middle school. This time, I chose the College of William and Mary in Virginia to deepen my knowledge of economics. This opportunity has changed me in the academic aspect but also mentally. **Although I used to be introverted and did not like talking with strangers, I became outgoing and talkative after living in America.** I assume I turned out to be like that because I had to. It had been a long time since the last time I had needed to make friends with effort.

As I am majoring economics in my home university, I took some courses in economics. The College of William and Mary is a liberal art college so that I could learn not only economics but also history, music, dance, and so on. It was an interesting time of my life and I genuinely liked it a lot. As I expected, the volume of studying was much bigger than that in my home university. I had to go to the library to study for classes hours a day and I crammed in the library on weekends, but I lived on campus so I had more free time. I spent time effectively by engaging with a lot of things. I belonged to the karate club, the field hockey club, and the fraternity. While I was delighted by being with friends, I had fun by myself by going to the gym for workouts and the lake to practice the guitar. **I literally did anything to cultivate myself and I believe it had me grown academically, physically, and socially.**

Another goal during studying abroad was to experience American culture which I often see in American movies. Fortunately, I could achieve that because of my kind friends. For Halloween, I tried pumpkin carving for the first time in my life and hosted a Halloween party with my mates. In November, one of my friends invited me to Thanksgiving dinner of her family and friends from the same orientation group had a Friendsgiving dinner together. I made Japanese cuisine even though I am not good at cooking usually.

Again, I would like to thank Mr. Watanabe and the U.S.-Japan Council for making my dream come true. **Hereby, I pledge to put that experience I have gained in America to use. My vision of the future is unclear yet. However, I would like to do what I can do with what I have gained from this experience.**





Miyako Tsujikawa

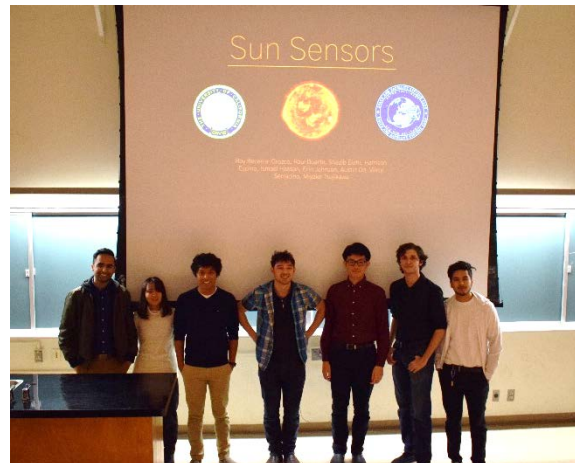
University of California, Davis (from Waseda University)

I did a lot of things before the winter quarter begin. At first, I went on a trip to Las Vegas, Seattle and Alaska with Chinese and Taiwanese friends. We kept in touch to make plan for this trip. After four days in Las Vegas and Seattle, we finally arrived at Fairbanks International Airport in Alaska. Even though I assumed it was too cold in December, I could not believe how cold it was. I really thought we were going to freeze and die.

In addition to the long trip, I prepared for moving to the new apartment from my host family who was taking care of me. They were nice to me and I was glad to get along with them to enjoy family events because my family did not do such a peaceful party in Japan. However, there was another Japanese exchange student in their house. She was also kind to me, but I talked with her in Japanese when our host family was out of the house. I thought I needed to reduce time to speak Japanese. So, I searched apartments and decided to live in an apartment near the UC Davis campus with five local students. This process about moving was so hard for me because I did not live alone in Japan. **However, I gained confidence throughout moving just for myself away from my home country.**

On the other hand, on UC Davis campus, I took various classes. One of the classes was fluid mechanics, which is most related to my major, aerospace engineering. I did not learn fluid mechanics in Japan, so I spent a lot of time to understand the context of this class. Another class was called presentation skills. Students learned how to express and communicate through giving several presentations in front of classmates. My professor was usually teaching acting, so doing exercises with her at class was a lot of fun because her story made me smile. The other class was English writing. In this class, I did timed writing and group work every week.

Considering whole my studying abroad in the United States, I learned a lot of things by staying for six months and communicating with local people. **One of the most important things is we must not judge someone by their skin or religion.** There are many people who have various background in the United States. Looking around me on campus, I realized appearance of individual diversity. When I met people I have not seen before, I made it a rule to keep that others have own opinions in mind. Therefore, I tried to just listen to their opinions. The third important I learned is becoming tolerant to others. We need to accept others' thoughts.





Hiroshi Watanabe

Stanford University (degree-seeking graduate student)

Academic-wise, I was able to focus deeply on the topics in relation to my dream (i.e., launching my new business to transform the conventional legal industry into a tech driven industry). The class called “Organizational Behavior” enabled me to lead a group of people by applying the human-psychological approach. Stanford Graduate School of Business’s signature class called “Leadership Lab” provided me with an opportunity to role-play with a lot of business issues in the presence of high-powered real CxOs and directors in the real world, enabling me to handle ad-hoc challenges by those CxOs’ random (and tough-to-answer) questions.

Extra-curricular-wise, I strived to socialize with other classmates as much as possible outside of the classroom as well. I joined “Section Olympics” where each section (i.e., each class) compete with each other in terms of multiple athletic activities such as volleyball, basketball, 100m run, soccer and tag-of-wars. Through this, I was able to organize practice sessions, energized other team members by cheering them up and congratulate the team members’ winning together. I believe this activity significantly contributed to my strong rapport with other classmates.

In the winter semester, I will further dive into startup-relevant courses, trying to strengthen my skillsets to make my dream come true. I will take a course called “Formation of New Ventures”, which provides students with precious opportunities of mingling with already-successful entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley. **I will leverage this valuable chance to seek for a new, innovative idea, team members and funding to start my new business.**

During the winter break, I will join the school trip to India. The theme of the trip is “Financial Inclusion”. Even though India is still suffering from a lot of domestic issues and overall income per capita is comparatively low, the country’s innovators have enabled almost all the citizens (including those who live in slums) to open bank accounts, borrow money and therefore have an opportunity to launch their own business. **I am curious to know how this was made possible under the harsh circumstances in the country, which might possibly shed light on coming up with solutions in relation to poverty and income inequality in Japan and U.S.**





Taiki Watanabe

San Jose State University (from Kyushu University)

I took three classes about aviation, which was my major, and a biology class that I was interested in. One of the aviation classes required students to make a business plan related to the aviation industry and present it at the end of the semester with their group members. Because this was of course in English, and the first time I made a presentation in English, I was so nervous and afraid. However, I could feel it was fun. It became an important experience for me.

Unfortunately, since the term of my studying abroad is just one semester, I cannot look forward to something in the next semester. However, I would like to continue to study something associated with

what I obtained in the US.

I had grown peacefully, but monotonously, until I decided to study abroad in the U.S. Honestly, I had not had a big obstacle in my life and the decision to go to the U.S. was the first thing I considered and decided by myself. I felt the lack of my ability to speak English, study in English, and communicate with people at the beginning of the term. **However, I can feel my English skills are improving, and I could make a few friends. Now, I can have confidence and the satisfaction of accomplishing.**

I have thought I would be an engineer since I have majored in aerospace engineering for a long time. However, I got new knowledge other than aerospace engineering in this study abroad, and I thought other topics were also interesting. Moreover, I was able to find another aspects related to aerospace engineering and aviation with studying other topics than primary major. Therefore, I found the importance of seeing things from other perspectives through this experience.





Myquel Zimmerman

Waseda University (from University of Oregon)

I entered Waseda University in the Fall of 2019, just as the Coronavirus outbreak was beginning in Wuhan, China. Little did I know that this study abroad experience would be my last international experience for the foreseeable future. Initially, I had absolutely no confidence in myself in being able to participate in a study abroad program. I was not going to be able to fiscally pocket the expenses — my family has worked themselves up to the middle class but the “lower class” fiscal-mentality still remains. Additionally, as an untreated student with ADHD, PTSD and a slew of unapproached mental health issues, the chances of participating essentially evaporated before I had even applied. So when I tell you that the process of applying and being accepted to study abroad in Japan was one of the pinnacles of joy in my life, I’d like you to know that it’s a genuine sentiment. **At the age of 26, studying Japanese at the University of Oregon had opened up a dormant scholar that I had never met up until that point.** I had gone through the motions throughout my life, but when I started to realize that I had true potential in learning the language, I ran with the confidence and found myself at the doorsteps of multiple generous donors, who understand the worth of international experience.

My time in the war with the military had made me a rather cynical person, considering that I had seen what the world was capable of. In contrast, the level of generosity shown by the scholarship donors and everyone involved with pushing students to apply and chase, what I deem of myself, seemingly impossible dreams. Personally, the chance to study abroad, awakened more than just a scholar. When I left for Japan, I was not entirely sure in what direction I was taking my life. I knew that I loved the Japanese language and culture and that I wanted to work in an international capacity with those things in hand – but the vision was not clear. **My study abroad experience clarified much of what I was unable to uncover alone.** I would still like to master Japanese to a degree, and I still want to serve as a bridge for the international community. What has changed is I now know my place in the universe and what role I need to fulfill. I understand that what I am about to say is a bit ambitious, especially coming from someone at the end of a major depressive episode – but this is all I have now. This is my life’s purpose. **The role I envision myself taking is one of an acting bridge and leadership position between the American and Japanese space industries. My work will go beyond these two countries, but I find America and Japan to be integral to my plan.** With experience and education in psychology, social science, law, military and Japanese – I foresee myself aiding the advancement of humanity in these ways. Japan and my study abroad experience has given me this vision; that we are truly the architects of reality and everything we do must be to the ends of conscious creation and sustainability. In this regard, I am eternally grateful for the purpose I have been given.



Messages from Scholars with Cancelled Programs



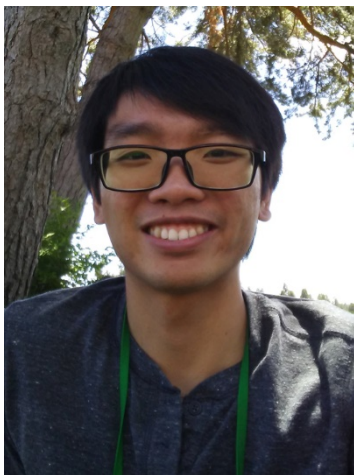
Juliet Bost

From University of California, Davis (was scheduled to study at Doshisha University)

Thank you for your wholehearted and generous support of young, driven, and enthusiastic students. I was fortunate enough to attend the Watanabe Leadership weekend in November 2019 and participate in the USJC Conference in Los Angeles, and it is a weekend I will never forget. It was my first experience at a professional conference, and the people I connected with -- both at the Watanabe Leadership workshop and USJC Conference -- were warm, inviting, and passionate. I especially appreciated the panels of young professionals that came to speak about their experience in US-Japan work or as Japanese-

American professionals. It's not often that Japanese-Americans are openly represented in a variety of fields -- particularly in politics outside of California -- and it was inspiring to meet young Watanabe alumni.

While my study abroad plans for spring 2020 did not go as planned, if another opportunity to study in Japan arises, I will absolutely take it. Receiving your scholarship and support has given me the confidence to pursue opportunities when they appear, no matter the limits I might believe exist. This summer, I have been working with San Francisco Supervisor Mar's office through an internship program. In the long term, I plan to apply for law school after completing my undergraduate degree in Political Science - Public Policy. As I continue forward on my career path, I will always know I can rely on the support network of Watanabe Scholars, Sumitomo and TOMODACHI participants, and the USJC members.



Hien Do

From the University of Oregon (was scheduled to study at Akita International University)

Dear Mr. Watanabe,

My name is Hien. Thank you for meeting us last year at the Leadership Weekend in Tokyo. I appreciated for a chance to see you and say thank you in person. I enjoyed the dinner very much and was able to get to know other scholars as well. How has your summer been? I hope you and your wife are doing well and staying safe. Because of COVID, I am planning to postpone my graduation to pursue a second major/minor and prepare for the next recruitment cycle. It was unfortunate that my study abroad could not happen, but I will visit Japan again in the future. Please take care!



Kris Ashley Gallardo

From San Diego State University (was scheduled to study at Rikkyo University)

During the USJC conference in Los Angeles, the experience was amazing. It was an honor meeting Mr. Watanabe to thank him for selecting me as a recipient of the scholarship out of the thousands that applied. I wasn't sure what to expect during the four-day conference. I learned more about Japanese culture through the history and I made some new friends which was quite unexpected. Despite being unable to study abroad in Japan for the spring semester, this conference has taught me to be more confident and to not be afraid to get out of my comfort zone.

For the upcoming fall semester, I will be finishing up my last year for my mechanical engineering major. I am still working part time to support my living expenses. I am hoping that next year when I graduate, I will be able to visit Japan and experience the culture. It may not be the study abroad experience that I had hoped for, but at least I would have the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture and I could meet the friends I made through the USJC conference.

I would like to say thank you again for selecting me for this competitive scholarship. You guys really would have made my dream come true if COVID-19 did not come around. I hope all you at the Watanabe/TOMODACHI scholarship stay safe and have a wonderful rest of your year.



Left: Kris-Ashley at 2019 USJC Annual Conference

Right: Juliet at 2019 USJC Annual Conference

Bottom: Hien at Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend in Tokyo



Photo Collage














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