



2020-2022
WATANABE SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

U.S.-Japan Council

Generously Supported by the Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship Fund

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Executive Summary

Year 2020 has brought a global challenge for everyone in the world. For the aspiring youth who have been planning their international study, the COVID-19 pandemic served as an absolute disruption. During this scholarship cycle, scholars were given the option to defer use of the scholarship to the Spring 2021, Fall 2021, or Spring 2022 academic year. Separate application cycle did not open for the Fall 2021 – Spring 2022 academic year.

However, we are truly encouraged by the resume of international travel, and proud to have supported a total of 28 (21 Japanese and 7 Americans) were selected to receive the scholarship for the 2020-2022 scholarship cycle, the Scholarship's 5th cohort. 2020-22 cohort's bios can be found online [here](#).

In promoting the 2020-22 scholarship application, a total of seven virtual info sessions were organized for American and Japanese students and administrators. It was 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. Also, the Watanabe Scholarship was promoted through U.S. Embassy and JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization) website and materials for U.S.-Japan exchanges.

Due to the COVID-19, selected Watanabe Scholar had their study abroad programs postponed, cancelled, or moved online. However, from Fall 2021, we were thrilled to see the some of the students were able to travel to commence their life-changing journey. In June and December 2021, Virtual Orientation was held for the scholars, where Mr. Watanabe shared his own study abroad experience as a university student, and word of encouragement to the scholars. (Watch Mr. Watanabe's message [here](#)).



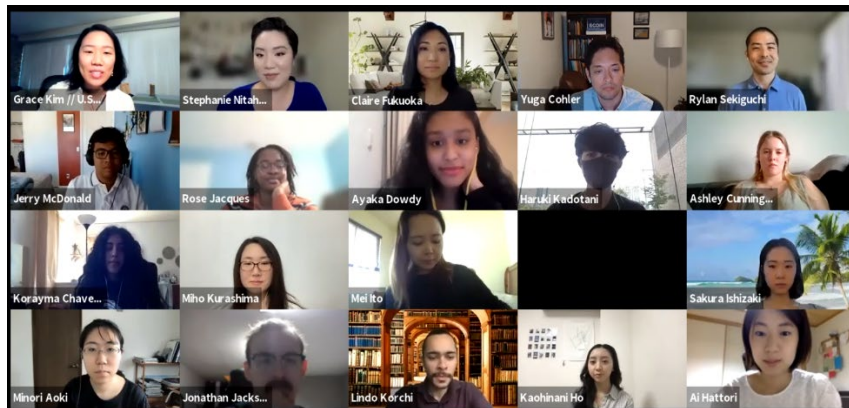
Mr. Watanabe gives a word of encouragement to the scholars during virtual orientation.

Traditionally in the past, we have conducted an in-person programming called the Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend, gathering the Japanese and American scholars in the U.S. and Japan, respectively. However, due to the pandemic, Watanabe Scholars Virtual Program was conducted virtually. In this virtual program, 2020-22 cohort got a chance to meet one another, learn about the U.S.-Japan Council and its members. The virtual program was consisted of the following components.

- 1) History of Japanese American in the U.S. - *Learn about the history of JA in the U.S.*
- 2) Young Professionals Panel - *Hear from USJC members on how they got to where they are today*

During the Young Professional Panel, the students heard from total of five young professionals to learn about their careers, mistakes made, observations, and collective insight they have gained over

the years. Panelists are members of the USJC and alumni of the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) who work in various fields across the United States. The scholars learned panelists' diverse, non-traditional career paths as well as an idea of giving back and how the panelists continue to contribute to the U.S.-Japan relationships.



Watanabe Scholars Virtual Leadership Program

We also conducted casual virtual hangout sessions in February and March 2021, where a total of 24 past and present scholars joined for a casual conversation. Japanese and American scholars across different cohorts were in attendance. We saw the importance of reaching out to scholars during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, to provide a space where they can connect with one another. The private Facebook Group page created in 2020 continue to be used to inform past and present scholars with relevant events and opportunities.

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. Watanabe for making the time for the virtual orientation. We look forward to the continued success of the Watanabe Scholarship program. We hope you enjoy this report and thank you once again.

Sincerely,
Grace Kim
Program Manager

About the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship Program

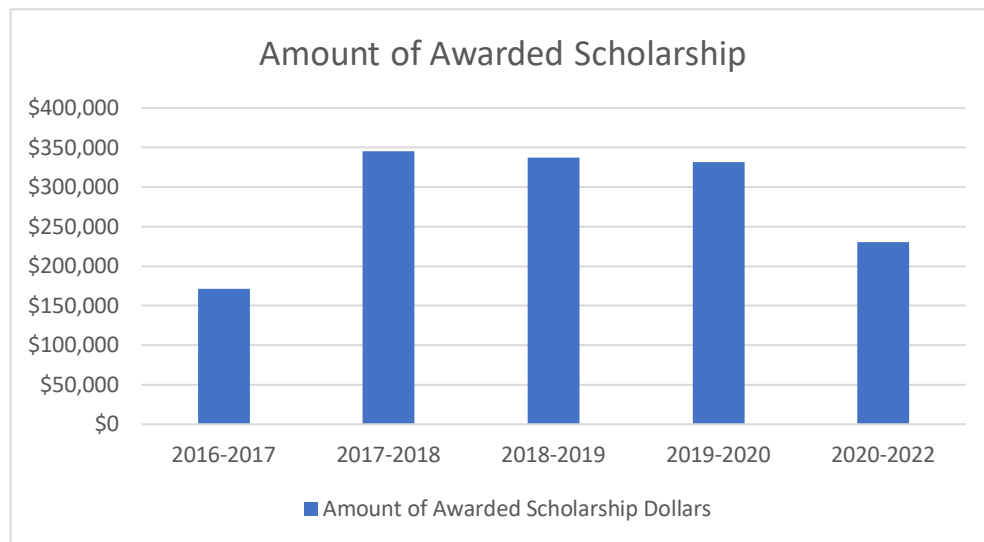
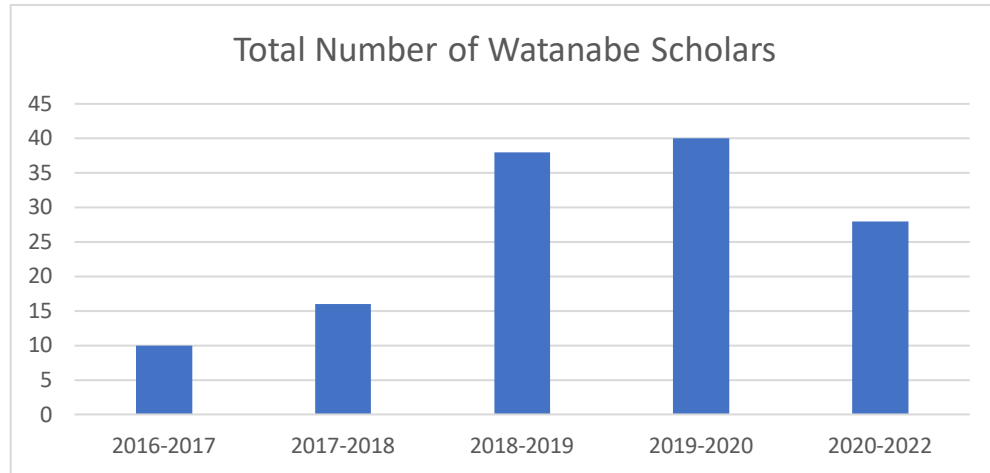
The Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship Fund provides financial assistance to undergraduate and graduate students for a semester or year-long study abroad program in either the United States or Japan. A generous endowment gift of \$10 million from Mr. Toshizo (Tom) Watanabe to the U.S.- Japan Council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



Scholarship Statistics



2020-2022 Watanabe Scholars' School List

Japanese Scholars Studied at...

- University of California, Berkeley
- Wesleyan University
- Williams College
- Middlebury college
- John Jay College
- Harvard University
- Grinnell College
- University of Hawaii - West Oahu
- The George Washington University
- University of Notre Dame
- University of California, Los Angeles
- Lawrence University
- University of North Carolina Wilmington
- Georgetown University
- University of Washington
- Bates College
- Chatham University
- University of Nebraska at Kearney
- Mount Holyoke College

Their Home Schools included...

(For those on exchange programs)

- Keio University

American Scholars Studied at...

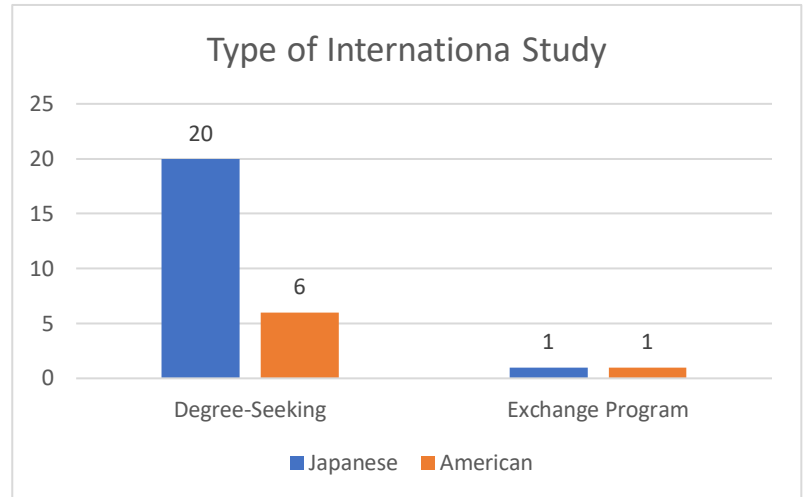
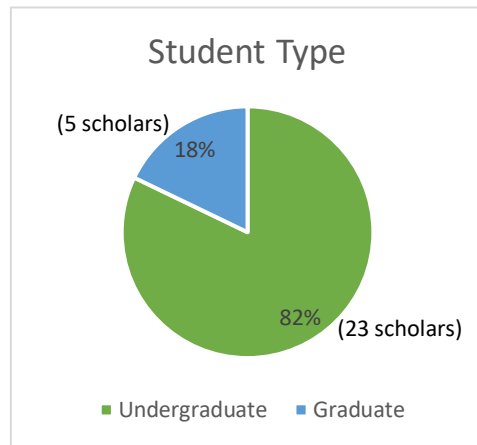
- Tokyo International University
- University of Tsukuba
- Temple University Japan
- Doshisha University

Their Home Schools included...

(For those on exchange programs)

- Kamehameha Schools Hawaii Campus
- Portland State University
- University of California, Riverside

2020-2022 Scholars At-A-Glance



Female: 22
Male: 6



**22% from Single
Parent Household**



**37% First Generation
Students**



21 Japanese Scholars



6 American Scholars

Watanabe Scholars Highlights



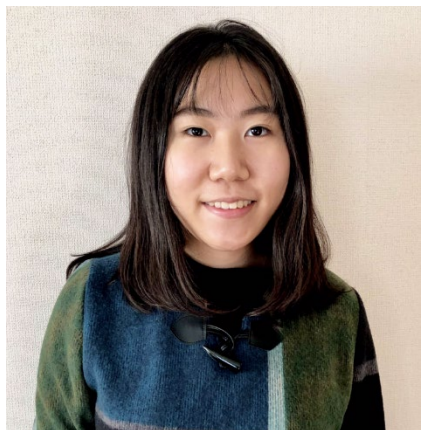
Riley Ablah

Tokyo International University (degree-seeking)

When I think back to the person I was in 2017 before I came to Japan, I realize how much studying abroad has changed me for the better. Since I've had the opportunity to be here, not only have my Japanese language skills immensely improved, but I've also had the chance to make friends from all over the world. My major—International Relations—was something that I knew very little about going into, but after studying it for four years I've come to find a deep interest in more specific aspects within the field. I personally never expected to enter a four-year university, but **it was probably one of the best decisions I could have made regarding my own personal growth.** Since studying abroad, I have become a more independent and responsible person. Because I lived alone throughout most of my university life, I had to manage things like bills and important paperwork. My time management skills also have improved. I've learned a lot more when it comes to accountability for my actions. Since I did not have anyone to fall back on so easily, I had to learn to take responsibility for my own actions both good and bad. **I feel more confident since I have studied abroad.**

Probably the most unexpected and unfortunate thing to happen was the spread of the Coronavirus. While I studied for four years in Japan, two of those years were online or hybrid due to the pandemic. The Coronavirus was a shock to everyone and was very hard on the world. For me personally, I was far away from family, isolated from my peers, and away from my home country. This made things especially difficult at times, notably because I also lived alone during the pandemic as well. Still, **the time in isolation allowed me to focus on studies and it is because of this that I really became strongly interested in International Relations.** In the same year of the Coronavirus, hard issues like racism also came to light in the US, and advocates for Black Lives Matter and #StopAsianHate began to trend. It was due to these human rights issues that I became specifically interested in Human Rights Activism and Sociology within the International Relations field.





Minori Aoki

University of California, Berkeley (degree-seeking)

I had the most fulfilling semester of undergraduate studies this fall, where I took 25 units of classes and additionally participated in a medical research internship. I took a Molecular Therapeutics class and met **Nobel Laureates whose contribution to medical research is globally recognized**. Learning about how drugs are developed and what we are missing in the currently available treatment options **strengthened my dream of becoming a physician scientist**.

I also applied a lot of concepts from the class to the internship where my team has been writing a grant proposal for a novel treatment method for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, a chronic inflammatory disease of the lungs. I could not be more appreciative of being a student at UC Berkeley where I can study under the **world-leading medical researchers**. As a pre-med student, I also participated in weekly virtual shadowing of doctors and learned about different specialties through their case studies.

For my music major classes, I took a seminar for upperclassmen where I studied Native American music and piano as well as Baroque music performance classes. The seminar course let me rethink about what music means to me and how it has been present in the **turning points in my life**, including when I moved to the U.S. and did not speak English but was able to make friends through music. I hope to volunteer in music therapy programs in the coming semester and help patients with recovery in a non-clinical way.



As a tip for the future Watanabe scholars, I would like to encourage them to not worry about having multiple interests or having too many classes they want to take; it really **expands one's perspective as any two subjects intersect in some form and understanding their relationship enables him/her to study from different angles**.

I would like to thank the U.S.-Japan Council and Mr. Watanabe for supporting me to have this irreplaceable learning experience. Through all the classes and internship that I participated in, I have grown a lot as a scholar and now have a clearer vision of what I want to pursue after graduation (MD-PhD). I also want to stay involved in the Council and offer any help I can to people interested in studying in the U.S. and be part of bridging the two countries.





Chavez Korayma

University of Tsukuba (degree-seeking graduate student)

I was not physically abroad for most of my scholarship term so my experience of being in Japan may be told in a completely different lens. School started at 4 in the afternoon and ended late at night mainly because of the time difference that I faced taking online classes from Los Angeles, California 16 hours behind Japanese Standard Time.

I had to readjust my entire schedule and focus on being a full-time student with an awkward time change. In my cohort there were 7 other students, and we were situated in different parts of the world: Pakistan, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Tsukuba, and Hong Kong. Most of my cohort members were mainly in Japan but the rest of us were in our respective cities and countries. **Since classes could not be held in person, we got very creative and took advantage that we were all placed in different parts of the world making it very international.**

Now as I finish reflecting and ending on a good note I am writing in a different location from where I started this report and that is in Seattle, Washington. On the plane ride heading to Japan, I applied to a teaching job in Seattle and was interviewed and hired while being abroad. I was very nervous applying for jobs initially because I did not know how much opportunity I would get with a foreign degree, but thanks to that degree and the location where I was at the time I stood out from other candidates! The school loved that I studied international education and not only that but in Japan with a focus in teaching, so they offered me the job and prepared me to start in summer of my returning. Now I am here in Seattle currently still new in my school that I work in and I love everything about being in a new city and environment with new people. **Thanks to studying abroad it made the transition much easier and it gave me the chance to apply to a job in another state and start all over.** That being said I wish things could've been different with COVID involved and I know I was not alone in this but moving forward I could see myself back in Japan and with all the people and connections made it was definitely not a goodbye it was just a see you later.





Ayaka Dowdy
Temple University Japan (degree-seeking)

Everyone has a different story that defines them as a person, and this is mine. My life in the United States was not what most would call exciting. My day would regularly consist of me going to school, coming home, watching television, and eating McDonalds. There was no adventure and there was no excitement. However, this worsened further when the pandemic forced me and everyone around me to stay in our homes, living tedious lives that never changed. Nevertheless, I would be lying to myself if I said that I did not enjoy that personal time the pandemic allotted me. To me there was no huge change that occurred in my life and that comforted me because I hated change. At some point I became too comfortable in my situation and felt that it was necessary that I changed my life and begin a journey where change was essential, and that first step was the Watanabe Scholarship. With the Watanabe Scholarship I was able to attend Temple University Japan Campus and move into an international dorm here in Tokyo. It is in Tokyo where my personal journey began. **Initially, I had a hard time conforming to the new world that I entered, thus, it was hard to make friends, and go out on adventures, especially when I was so scared to go adventure out and do anything by myself.** The fear of getting lost and the fear of not knowing the language very well held me back from fully making the most out of the opportunity that I have been given. In the beginning, not much was different from my life back in the United States as my daily activities did not change much. **However, after the first month here I was able to meet several people from my university as well as other Japanese universities that brought joy into my life.**

I have had a lot of fun in Japan, and I feel that **I have grown as a person and are more open to change.** I feel that I understand myself more and know what path I want to lead in the future compared to the beginning of my journey where I was walking in a blur unsure of my life to come. The three programs that the Watanabe Scholarship gave me the chance to attend allowed me to meet other scholars and leaders who impacted my decisions on the future. From these individuals **I was able to understand that I do not have to have everything figured out right now and that it is important that explore Japan and the opportunities that have been given to me.** Overall, I learned from those sessions that making the most out of my time and understanding better who I am and what I want to do is what I should get out of my experience here. To those future Watanabe scholars, I would say that school is important and that it should be put first when studying abroad, but do not forget to adventure out into your new environment and take chances even though they might be scary so that you have no regrets when your story ends.





Jennie Ebihara
Wesleyan University (degree-seeking)

As I reflect on the past two years, one of the biggest things studying abroad in a liberal arts college with an open curriculum had allowed me to do is to embrace and navigate academic ambiguity.

As someone who has always been goal driven, I went into college determined to study societal structures and constructs through Psychology and Economics and live according to my game plan.

This was before I quickly realized that the study of Psychology was more geared towards understanding the natural sciences rather than it being a social science that could help me interpret the society around me. After shopping around and taking a range of classes in economics, philosophy, politics, and even environmental sciences, biology, and classical studies, **I reaffirmed my passions towards the social sciences**, declaring a double major in Economics and the College of Social Studies, a Wesleyan specific major that provides an interdisciplinary curriculum of Politics, Economics, and History.

While such a vast learning curriculum of the social sciences means that my career path and goals remain open-ended to a certain extent, learning thoroughly on three subjects has allowed me to hone the skill of learning and articulating ideas. For example, while interpreting Economic patterns are more reliant on identifying certain formulas and theories, interpreting history becomes quite subjective according to each historian's perspective. Learning how to learn and write about each subject quickly has become the single most important skill I have picked up since coming to Wesleyan, and **I have found new comfort in knowing that learning how to learn is as important as being determined to achieve a specific career goal.**





Yuichi Fukunaga
Williams College (degree-seeking)

With generous support from Watanabe Scholarship, I have completed Spring 2020 remotely and Fall 2021 in-person at Williams College. The combination of remote and in-person learning made the undergraduate experience unique and irreplaceable.

At Williams, I seek to expand on skills and knowledge at Riken to investigate engrams responsible for extinction in mice with in-vivo imaging techniques (e.g., calcium imaging, in-vivo electrophysiology). The aim of this research is to discover the neural ensembles that could explain the etiology of psychiatric disorders (e.g., depression, post-traumatic stress disorder). **The clinical significance of this study is immense, and I am keen to leverage this finding to delve more deeply into this experimental paradigm and lead the field of neuroscience.**

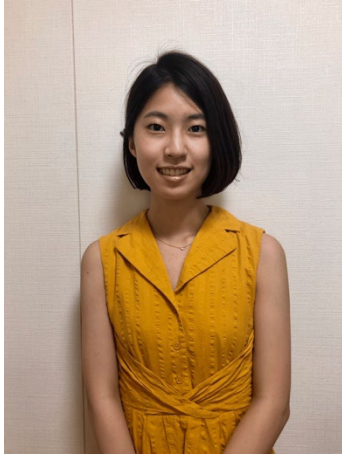
I live in a dorm with close friends from first year, hanging out on weekends and having a wide range of conversations. One of the pod mates is the founder of the bioengineering group at Williams and interested in commercializing his independent study in bacteria. His passion for bioengineering is endless, and every time we encounter each other on campus, he talks about papers he recently read or lab work on the day. When we talk about such academic topics, he always makes me wonder what I want to pursue at Williams and beyond. Liberal arts education at Williams opens gates to careers in diverse fields.

Some of the advice that I would give to future cohorts of Watanabe Scholarship is three-folded. First, I would encourage them to take advantage of all the resources available before, during, and after their study-away programs. **Because college is the best and the last place where you can explore and experiment with diverse disciplines for most people, I recommend making most of the moratorium.**

The second advice is that you make friends with diverse backgrounds. There are many students that you would never meet in your life if you were not studying away. By interaction with people with different backgrounds, you understand more about yourself and broaden your perspective. Finally, I highly recommend that you have fun in the study-away experience.

All the experiences in the previous year convinced me to apply to PhD programs in neuroscience in the United States. I am keen to leverage my research at Williams to investigate further the neurobiological mechanism underlying the development of psychopathology. Through it all, I would like to maximize my potential and reach a far-reaching goal to lead the field of neuroscience. Again, I cannot thank Mr. Watanabe enough for supporting my academic path and making this study-away experience possible.





Ai Hattori

Middlebury College (degree-seeking)

During the academic year 2021-2022, I have had the privilege to receive this scholarship and study abroad at Middlebury College, a small liberal arts college in Vermont. I chose liberal arts college because I liked the freedom to explore different disciplines in the first two years and then decide what I wanted to study. In other words, I originally chose liberal arts institution for my own benefit.

Thus, I was very surprised when I took a class called “Sophomore Seminar in the Liberal Arts” and encountered an idea that liberal arts education is not about studying anything I want. As the class title suggests, the class only consisted of sophomores, and it aimed to encourage them to reflect on their first year in the liberal arts college.

Overall, my view on the meaning of liberal arts education changed from “freedom to study anything I want” to **“freedom to discover my connections with others and explore ways to contribute to my community.”** This change was completely unexpected, yet it allowed me to have a habit of reflecting constantly on whether I use my privilege in the right ways. **I believe that this realization of one’s privilege and constant reflection on how one can use their privilege at college and beyond are keys for more equity in the future.** For this reason, I consider liberal arts education as a contributor to positive social impact, and it is my hope that I will be able to bring liberal arts education (a long-established education method in the US) to Japan and enable more Japanese youth to have the similar experience one day.





Kaohinani Ho

Temple University Japan (degree-seeking)

Through coming to TUJ and Japan, I have gotten opportunities to explore my interests, career path, and establish global connections. Moreover, by majoring in International Business, I have learned about multiple facets of business.

One experience that allowed me to do so was my internship at CPR Tokyo, a fashion PR and consulting company. During my internship, I worked on various projects regarding fashion, such as planning events. However, on a day-to-day basis, I was leasing out clothing pieces and accessories to fashion stylists for magazines and other productions. While it was only for the summer, it gave me a sneak peek into Tokyo's fashion industry.

Overall, my experience in Japan has forced me to grow in a lot of ways. It has challenged me mentally but taught me so much. Going forward I have many aspirations regarding my career and future in general. I would like to explore the fashion industry in Tokyo more, but I am also interested in exploring IT. I also look forward to making more connections and memories with my friends.

Coming to Japan was nerve-racking but exciting. **After living alone in Japan, I am grateful for all the ups and downs I have experienced.** Being able to use Japanese and English daily has not only helped me improve my Japanese skills but has allowed me to embrace myself more freely. I have met other individuals who come from a similar background or are like-minded which has allowed me to become more comfortable with expressing my individuality. **While figuring out how I can embrace all sides of me has been difficult, being of mixed background is a part of who I am.** No matter what changes occur around me, I know I always have my roots to guide and ground me.





Ai Inaba

John Jay College (degree-seeking)

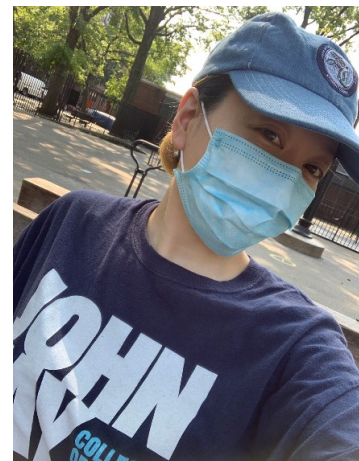
The chance to continue studying abroad was crucial for me to gain advanced scientific knowledge and complete my bachelor's degree in the U.S. When I received the Watanabe Scholarship award letter, I was a senior student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. I felt so blessed to read the letter because it wouldn't be possible for me to finish my undergraduate study without financial support. Most importantly, through this scholarship and study abroad, I had been privileged not only to gain academic and research experience but also to learn the importance of diversity and have opportunities to study with students from various backgrounds, countries, and ethnicities at one of the most diverse institutions in the country.

As a scholar of the U.S.-Japan Council Watanabe Study Abroad Program and the Program for Research Initiatives for Science and Math (PRISM) at John Jay College, **I have also learned how scientific research can make a positive impact on society and how important it is to establish an environment where everyone has equal opportunity to learn and succeed regardless of their background, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and economic status.**

As an international student, I struggled immensely in finding research opportunities and financial resources. However, Watanabe scholarship and PRISM helped me continue my study and gave me diverse research experiences, invaluable relationships with mentors and professors, and a strong network of supports. I represent as and will forever be proud of being a Watanabe scholar at John Jay College where I learned, grew, and succeed.



After obtaining my Ph.D., I would like to become a university professor and researcher to support and mentor both Japanese and American students who aim to study and succeed abroad. Needless to say, it is also important to further improve the U.S.- Japan relation to advance both countries that will ultimately advance other countries and improve the world. I would like to continue being a part of the Watanabe Scholarship community and the U.S.-Japan Council and work globally to contribute to furthering the U.S.-Japan relation.





Sara Inoue

Harvard University (degree-seeking graduate student)

My graduate school journey that started in August 2020 did not have a smooth start. The way we learn and connect with others has changed dramatically since the hit of Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020.

My graduate school life, which I had believed to take place in Cambridge, began on the second floor of my parents' house in Machida City, Tokyo. On the screen was a group of educators from all over the world, with varying degrees of experience and interests: a founder of a school based on positive psychology in Egypt, an organizer of a non-profit organization in India that supports socio-emotional learning for poor children, and a grandmother who had taught art for 40 years and then came to graduate school to learn more about the development of her newborn grandchildren. Amazing people, all in their own tiny 4x2cm pixels. Bumping into each other at a café and ending up talking about the healthy development of children for two hours until we both get hungry and go to the cafeteria to grab dinner. That was a dream that was impossible to pursue. **There were millions of students of all ages in the world who felt the same way as I did.**

However, there is a silver lining to everything. Because I stayed in Japan, I was able to continue teaching my Japanese students part time. Of course, taking grad school classes as late as 1:30 am, or on somedays, as early as 4:30 am was no easy feat. But it created a positive loop of learning through doing. For example, let's say we learn about Self-Determination Theory of Motivation on Monday at my Harvard class. The very next day, I can use the theory to teach my students. Learning came out of textbooks and became something tangible and practical. **I felt like I was able to give back to my community by sharing my learning with them.** Quoting my professor, who was quoting Theodore Roosevelt, "it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. We all learned that during the difficult two years of darkness."





Sakura Ishizaki
Grinnell College (degree-seeking)

Through my anthropology courses, I learned that every culture is beautiful in its own way and that no two cultures can be compared in terms of superiority or sophistication.

Nowadays, I often see Japanese articles on various topics asserting that the Japanese need to emulate and catch up with the Western Countries. While I may have agreed with those articles prior to my study abroad experience, today, I am critical of those arguments. The Japanese, in my view, have their own unique way of using their skills to overcome challenges, rather than simply trying to mimic the methods employed by western countries. **Currently, with my passion for medicine, I am especially interested in how Japanese hospitals can evolve to become more pandemic resilient in a way that best fits the Japanese culture.**

One of the greatest highlights of this academic year was the initiation of the medical anthropology project titled, “Medical Decision-Making in Intensive Care Units in Japanese Hospitals during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” This project was made possible through support from both the Anthropology Department at my college and infectious disease physician-scientists at Tohoku University. One of the main goals of this research is to reveal the thought process of the medical professionals regarding two major decision-making situations: patients’ election into the ICU and ventilator allocation. This research has social significance, as currently, the medical decisions made in the Japanese ICUs—including who to accept into the ICU and who to allocate the ventilators to—are not apparent to the public. **Revealing the decision-making process will advance our understanding of hospital response to pandemics and spark discussion of how we could better prepare medical professionals, and moreover, Japanese hospitals, for future pandemics.**





Mei Ito

University of Hawaii - West Oahu (degree-seeking)

Throughout the first few months of the year, I was deeply thinking about what my motivation was/would be and looked back to my application essay for this Watanabe Scholarship. I was reminded of what made me want to come to Hawaii. **I realized that the way I felt during this pandemic was very similar to the way I felt back in my hometown in Onagawa during 2011; "There is nothing in the world that can be taken for granted."**

Expectation and hope should be two completely different things. Now, I am genuinely grateful for every small thing in my life.

This year of 2021 marked the ten years since the 2011 Tohoku earthquake happened. It is hard to put it into words, but I did not expect to be in Hawaii ten years after that. Also, I started to think that the reason why I came here was that it was meant to be. Thus, **I tried to find something that "I" could do for this turning point.** Soon after, I got a call from an acquaintance, and she told me that she wanted me to do an interview for a documentary about the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and my feelings about it since then for a local TV station. I did not expect something like this, but I took this opportunity as the best chance to tell my appreciation to the people who helped us from Hawaii. The photo is taken at the Hawaii local TV station, Hawaii News Now with a news reporter Ashley Nagaoka.



Being a U.S.-Japan Council Watanabe scholar is honorable for me. Not only that, but also this **scholarship program gave me great opportunities to deeply think about my career, identity, and my life.** I am very grateful that I could be a member of this society and appreciate everyone involved with me. The upcoming spring 2022 semester will be my last semester in the undergraduate program at the University of Hawaii. I would like to make the most of what I have learned.

I decided to do an internship as my capstone project and am now looking for a company that would accept me. Also, I had started job hunting both in Japan and the U.S. For the long-term goal, I am thinking of getting a master's degree after earning a few years of working experience in the accounting field. Then, I will be qualified to get the license of Certificated Public Accountant. Again, my educational pursuits would not be possible without the generous support of the Watanabe scholarship. Every experience through this program was fresh and stimulating for me. I sincerely appreciate it for enabling me to pursue my dreams.





Yosei Izumi

The George Washington University (degree-seeking)

The 2021-22 academic year was my third and final year as an undergraduate student, but it was also a 'come back year', for I had been away from the U.S for 18 months amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This report reflects on the year beginning with the special events I have had the privilege to attend at GWU, and a brief story of winter break, followed by the project I had the opportunity to work on for most of the academic year.

After a quick account of the completion of my thesis and the experience of graduation, the report caps off with a look back at the whole year under the Watanabe Scholarship Program and an outline of the next steps that lie ahead.

Despite all the disruptions that came from the pandemic, my three university years still went by in a flash. As reviewed in this report, this past academic year, with the support of the Watanabe Scholarship Program, proved to be the most eventful, and the richest of the three years. **I have established relationships and connections that I would not have been unable to make elsewhere, and have worked on unexpected projects which only could have happened in D.C.**

Looking ahead, my time in D.C has led me to a position as a program assistant in a D.C-based NGO called the US-Asia Institute. It is a short-term position at a humble institution, but a thrilling next step that allows me to work in the public sector with embassies, congressional staffers, and members of the Chinese Communist Party. **Having been a student of international relations in the capital of the U.S, the opportunity to step into work in government relations is a chance to put the passion of my undergraduate years into practice.** The experience of studying abroad has also led me to an offer in place to start as a business analyst in Deloitte Tohmatsu Consulting from 2023 October in Tokyo: an opportunity to receive exposure to businesses in both the public and private sector.





Haruki Kadotani

University of Notre Dame (from Keio University)

Born and grown up in Japan, I had never stayed abroad for more than two weeks. I appreciate Watanabe Scholarship and the U.S.-Japan Council for giving me a great opportunity to study abroad regardless under difficult situations of the pandemic.

In 2021, from January to June, I spent a semester abroad as a visiting student at the University of Notre Dame, a private catholic university in South Bend, Indiana. I had planned to spend two semesters there from October 2020, but, unfortunately, my home institution in Japan cancelled a study abroad program. Since I could not defer participating in the program because of my class year, Watanabe Scholarship made it possible to experience a life in the U.S. without financial concern. I appreciate Mr. Watanabe and those who are involved in the scholarship for supports.

Soon after arriving in the US, I encountered a lot of challenges. The first one is the difficulty in listening English. I think I had well prepared to improve my English proficiency. However, I found face masks, one of the universal coronavirus measures, made it more difficult to communicate in a foreign language because it deprives visual information (e.g., movement of a mouth) from communication.

I could overcome the hurdle after about two months of arrival by trying to communicate with others as much as possible.

The second challenge was that I must accustom with dorm culture of Dunne Dorm where I was living in. Closely knit community is one of the unique advantages of Notre Dame. But it was a challenge for me. **Since I had never lived abroad, I experienced culture shocks.** In addition, I must compromise my lifestyle with roommates/others who share block with me. To look back days in Notre Dame, time has eased the sense of uncomfortable. Since I cannot experience those culture shocks unless I choose to study in the US in-person (not through online).

Finally, at Notre Dame, there were only five students who are from Japan. Because of that, I have been frequently asked to explain many aspects about Japan (from politics to culture such as Anime, Manga, etc...). **I gradually became aware of my identity.** After getting back to Japan, I try to become more familiar with Japanese culture.

Overall, studying abroad could broaden my perspectives in many aspects. I will list some examples below. **First, staying for six months in a small town in Midwest changed my stereotype of the United States of America.** It is quite rare in Japan to get in touch with news not from West/East Coast



but from Midwest. It is usually depicted as advanced and wealthy nation. However, Northern Indiana is core region of "Rust Belt", a dark side of the U.S. economy. While I drive to other cities, I saw quite a lot of empty houses. Second, I was spurred by how students at Notre Dame are eager to learn foreign languages and conditions. My attitudes toward foreign languages became positive and I started to study German for my future.



Choran Kamijo

University of California, Los Angeles (degree-seeking)

I started my U.S. study abroad journey in California, Cupertino after I graduated from high school. It was a hard decision for me to go to the states because all my high school friends went to famous Japanese universities, so **I had no other peers that I could put as my role models**. However, I believed in my capabilities, so I decided to come to the state.

After three months of language school, I entered a community college. It was one of the hardest times in my U.S. study abroad journey because my family was facing a crucial financial hardship at that time. Because of that, I started to work as a Japanese and Chinese tutor, and also worked as a cafeteria server on weekdays in the college, while I was working as a nanny on weekends. Even though it was the hardest time for me, I got a lot of precious friends during that time. **Everyone was so unique, humble, and aggressive for their dream, who I would never have met in Japan**. I was so amazed by how my friends are all working so hard, even though they are also under some financial hardship. Because of spending time with them, I got cheered up so much from them.



In the first year of college, I joined a marketing club and a k-pop dance club. I worked as a photographer in the marketing club and a dance member in the k-pop dance club. It was an amazing experience because I could meet different local students through those two clubs. It was a little bit scary when I just decided to join both teams at the beginning, but as we spent time together, we started to know each other more and more, and I luckily earned my lifelong friends there.

The other thing, I am glad that I decided to go to the United State was, I started to love my mixed-up background much more than before. When I was in Japan, I always tried to hide my Chinese heritage because I know there are some conflicts between Japan and China. Because of that, I was always ashamed of my parents' Japanese because of their Chinese accents. However, People in the U.S., especially in CA, were always saying my background is just amazing and cool. **Because of that, I started to gain more and more self-confidence during my study abroad period.**

After all of my study abroad journey, I decided to use my optional practical training system to stay here three years and see what I can reach in this period. I have been through so much hardship in my college life, especially because of my parent's financial hardship, but **I am sure those things made me grow up and be a strong adult**. Without those generous help from all of my mentors, and support from the Watanabe Scholarship team, I could not have reached the diploma, and decided to pursue my dreams, and met my lifelong friends. I appreciate from the bottom of my heart all of the support that people have given me, and I will make sure to reach all my goals.





Sara Kim
George Washington University (degree-seeking)

While I studied abroad, I was a group leader at the young college student leadership summit and had an opportunity to visit capitol hill to meet several congressmen. Our team visited Representative Don Beyer (Virginia) and Representative Paul Gosar (Arizona) office at the time. My group discussed immigration issues and adoptee rights with Representative Paul Gosar and after a few weeks we received an email about we obtained co-sponsorship on the Adoptee Citizenship Act from Representative Paul Gosar. **It was a very special experience having discussion with US congressman in person** and we could convince him to support adoptee rights, which was very honored to support adoptees who came to the US but have been struggling with their US citizenship due to complicated US immigration laws.

I also met with middle school to high school students visiting from Japan and Korea. The program was about supporting children who come from lower-class families and giving them opportunities to interact with professionals who have done study abroad in the US. As a first-generation student, I deeply understand how hard it is to study abroad, especially for children with a lack of support from their families. **I could hear their dream, hobby, or interests and I could tell my study abroad story to give them courage and hope for their future career.** I couldn't do study abroad (graduating college or getting job) without support from many people including the US-Japan council. I really appreciate I had an opportunity that I can inspire others to chase their dream in any circumstance.



I re-read the Watanabe scholarship essay I wrote it back in 2019. My essay highly focuses on how I have gone through financial hardships without others' support and how I overcome struggles all by myself. Yet, I would not say this is not a fact, but now **I see my journey of studying abroad as an extremely valuable experience that helped me build an exceptional perspective of the world and my life.** In the essay, I wrote "For me, studying abroad is not just getting a degree or learning English, it means overcoming "low-income social class," and not wasting my parent's sacrifices..." Now I would like to rephrase my meaning of studying abroad: Studying abroad is not just getting a degree or learning English, it was a journey that continuously teaches me to realize how I am a blessed person who has supportive friends, family, and countries to help me grow, and how my multicultural background and experiences are priceless assets that can inspire others and contribute great value to the global society.





Lindo Korchi

Tokyo International University (degree-seeking)

Deciding to attend a university in Japan was a big decision. I was always interested in Japan's unique culture, how it was able to develop, its language, history, along with the country's unique distinctions. Through that, I have been able to experience different aspects of Japan, view the country with a rational lens, and pursue an education at a university in Japan.

I knew that I wanted to contribute to Japan, so studying in Japan made sense. With the Watanabe Scholarship, I've been able to have the opportunity to pursue higher education in Japan, which has been incredibly beneficial.

During the Spring 2021 and Fall 2021 semester studying at Tokyo International University, **I was able to develop a deeper understanding of International Relations with a variety of courses that had a strong academic focus.** I was challenged to see the world from different perspectives that I wasn't aware of. The classes I took provided me with a variety of lenses. To put it in visual terms, I feel I began the Spring 2021 semester with a collection of six lenses to pair onto my glasses. After being challenged, having discussions with my classmates/professors, conducting research, writing reports, and alike, I feel I then concluded the Fall 2021 semester with not just a few extra lenses to go with my current pair of glasses, but also a few additional glasses as well. Thus, I'm extremely proud and grateful to have been given the opportunity to expand and deepen my understanding of international relations. I think this is especially important because if a person doesn't know what they don't know, then they can't (or would find it extremely challenging to) seek out what they don't know. With the university classes, there was a structure, along with different ideas that led me to topics, conclusions, and discussions that I would have not acquired on my own. Some of the classes and concepts derive from Global Sociology, Human Rights, Japanese Society, International Law, International Relations, and how systems, our current thoughts, and alike are formed, influenced, and impacted. **This will help me in my career of relationship building between the United States and Japan.**



Miho Kurashima

University of North Carolina Wilmington (degree-seeking)



As the final chapter of my undergraduate study, this semester provided many opportunities for my personal growth. I took four online classes from Japan this semester, namely Producing: Documentary, Studies in Film Styles and Genres, Directed Individual Study: Directing Short Film, and Introduction to International Relations. **These classes certainly helped me deepen my understanding of producing and directing inspirational videos and fundamentals of International Relations.**

I maintained my position as a public affairs department staff member at the Japan Research Institute, Limited., a Tokyo based research company, to learn how to control multimedia tools and strengthen public recognition of the organization. I also served as a Video Editing Volunteer at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Tokyo Office, where I could reinforce my ability of video editing skills and support their 75th anniversary projects to visualize their tireless works for child rights and for the well-being of every child. Amongst all, the highlight of this semester was the practical filmmaking project of producing a documentary about Gender Equality and Teaching the future generation. As part of the filmmaking classwork, I was given an opportunity to work in a team learning how to produce an international collaborative film.



Discussing filmmaking and distribution strategies during online meetings with team members uncovered my strengths and weaknesses as a team player. **These realizations enhanced my will to contribute as a professional in the global arena after I completed my study and motivated me to pursue my dream job to be an international media creator.**



I want to advise the next cohort of Watanabe Scholars or people considering studying abroad not to be afraid of making mistakes. When I had a big presentation in class, I could not enjoy the moment because I was too nervous and fearful of making mistakes. However, **I learned that even mistakes make me improve and hone my ability.** Every failure is a steppingstone that leads to success, so I would encourage future young talents to challenge anything without fear and enjoy every moment of their experiences.



Kana Matsuno
Georgetown University (degree-seeking)

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the US-Japan Council, the Watanabe Toshizo Scholarship, and the Watanabe family. Without their generous financial support, completing my study for a Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) at Georgetown University wouldn't have been possible.

As I reflect on my time at MSFS, despite the Global Pandemic limiting various in-person opportunities we would normally have, it was an extremely humbling and inspiring experience to learn with and from such diverse and talented classmates.

Learning about how to help spread prosperity, end violent conflict, make the economy sustainable, and strengthen the international system in these times has never been more important than ever. We discussed how to achieve shared prosperity and a sustainable economy inside and outside the classes. It is not comfortable to realize that sometimes people who disagree with us are equally well-read, well-educated, and well-researched; they can hold the same commitment to bettering the world unites us all and still hold the view we cannot stand. It is not comfortable to acknowledge that even if we work for the quality of gender, ethnicity, and LGBTQ community, there are undoubtedly other members of society who we ignore today and whose rights and dreams may wait for another generation to be fulfilled. **While I often have been overwhelmed by the gravity of the challenges we face today, I was constantly amazed by my classmate, not in their tolerance to the difficulty but their active pursuit of service of the clumsy, uncomfortable beauty that comes from life and pursuit of service of others.**

My two cents for new scholars: first, take advantage of what's been offered to you – including career service, professor's office hours, and counseling services. When you have challenges, even small ones, please reach out to people in your community. You will be surprised how much generosity and support people are willing to give you. Second, build a good relationship with your friends. It is important to focus on your study, but it is equally important to enjoy cultural exchanges and your life abroad.





Nagara Kei
University of Washington (degree-seeking)

Watanabe scholarship allowed me to seize a great opportunity to complete my degree and find synergy and new perspectives. In 2019, my study abroad journey starting from an English language school was halted due to financial constraints in the face of my father's demise. I had no choice but to leave the university I once transferred to from a community college in Washington State and return to Japan.

However, being selected as one of the 2020-2022 Watanabe Scholars gave me the light at the end of the tunnel, as I was eager to explore social issues in an interdisciplinary way at a North American university, even after dropping out of college. **The Watanabe Scholars Virtual Program allowed me to hear from USJC members about their career paths and backgrounds, which helped me think about my own future when I return to college.**

After I re-transferred to the University of Washington, I took all courses online from Japan for a year and then moved to Seattle as a senior in college. **What most left an impression was that I conducted an experimental study on the relationship between attribution of failure experiences and self-control.** I worked on this project for about three months with a research partner.

I hadn't seriously studied the English language until graduating my high school in Japan. The reason I decided to study abroad was that I couldn't decide on a major when I graduated high school. Up until now, I have experienced many hardships. However, I was able to study what I love at my dream university. Moreover, I was able to have a new dream. I believe that no matter what obstacles stand in our way if we have the courage to have our dreams and keep pursuing them, they will come true one day. I will continue to challenge myself in the future. If you are reading this, let's work hard together. Let's talk about each other's dreams someday. I look forward to seeing that happen one day.





Ayano Nakamura
Bates College (degree-seeking)

In my sophomore year at Bates College, I have grown, matured, and became much aware of what I want to do for my future. The fall semester included me adjusting to the new system under coronavirus: with half of my classes being done remotely, attending events and clubs on zoom, and navigating through tough restrictions on campus.

Despite these difficulties, I was so grateful every day for my college to open up for students when many other higher institutions were not letting students into their buildings. **Thanks to the effort the faculty and staff made, I was able to fully focus on my studies, make in-person relationships with peers, go to some club meetings, and explore the state of Maine.**

My focus for my fall semester was to fully immerse myself into the Bates community and get to know Bates on a deeper level. I tried my best to do so by being an event coordinator at Sangai Asia Club, which is an organization that celebrates all Asian cultures and identities. I would coordinate with the college and host in-person events that followed the college's COVID-19 guidelines. In the first event I organized, which was the "Chinese New Year Event", I was able to gather the maximum number of participants the college allowed and did many social distancing activities for the students to do.

In my spring semester, I focused on balancing my intense academic schedule, exploring the state of Maine, and continuing strong with my Sangai Asia Club. In terms of academic schedules, I took a Sociology research course which was very heavy in workload. **The amount of knowledge and memorization I needed to do for this class was very overwhelming at first, however, I learned to adapt by actively being in touch with my professor by going to many office hours.**

While I was working hard in my courses, I also took time to explore and travel around Maine during the weekends. Every weekend, my friends and I explored new parts of the state and did many activities such as hiking, stargazing, and camping. **My favorite memory was stargazing with peers near the college at night, talking about our dreams, and getting to know ourselves more.** These moments were the times where I would be reminded of how grateful I was to have this opportunity to get to know others from different backgrounds and cultures on a deeper level. By being outside and enjoying the beauty of nature, I was able to fully connect to nature, the people around me, and be grateful for what I have.





Sayaka Ojima
Chatham University (degree-seeking)

Thanks to Watanabe Scholarship, I was able to finish my last semester and graduate from Chatham University, Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. I am honored and grateful for being chosen as a Watanabe scholar. Having been able to study abroad in the U.S. has enriched my knowledge and broadened my insights in the society. This experience would keep making a huge impact on my life.

Living and studying abroad in the U.S. has made me want to pursue a career in international business. After graduating from college, I got a job in a Japanese company that has branch companies in the U.S. and Mexico. I have been studying Spanish to be able to communicate with workers in Mexico. Learning and using English as a communication tool has taught me the joy of learning another language. I am planning to keep studying Spanish and Arabic, which I took a class in college.

I will start working in a different state from the one where I went to school. Since the U.S. is huge and different regions have different cultures, I might face challenges to get used to living there by myself. **I am confident that I will succeed and overcome different obstacles because of my previous experience.** Although this career path was not what I was expecting to take, I am excited to learn more about the automobile industry and international business. Through business, I am hoping to contribute the improvement and strengthening of the relationship between the U.S. and Japan.

“The Mind Is Like a Parachute, It works Only When It Is Open.”
It works Only When It Is Open.” **Although I do not have any regrets, I wish I had been more comfortable with making mistakes.** That would have helped me to be more friendly and open to talk to new people. At the beginning of my studying abroad, I was very insecure about my English, especially pronunciation. Even though my friends and other students always complimented my English, I still did not feel confident in speaking English. Because of that, I was always quiet and not talkative. I am sure that I did miss a lot of opportunities to meet great people. Thus, **my advice would be not to be afraid of making mistakes in English.** You are speaking a non-native language. It is more than okay to make mistakes. People who speak multiple languages know how hard it is to learn a new language.



To meet people from different parts of the U.S. or with different religious or political beliefs helped me to understand American culture as well as Japanese culture. I hope that future Watanabe scholars would enjoy their opportunities to study abroad and learn American culture and Japanese culture at the same time.



Rina Pokharel

University of Nebraska at Kearney (degree seeking)

I decided to pursue my undergraduate degree at University of Nebraska at Kearney located in Kearney, Nebraska. While looking up other countries, I decided to talk to some of my friends that I went to high school with back in Nepal. 2 of them were studying at UNK and told me how they had been enjoying their study abroad experience. Luckily, around the same time I had a plan to visit the U.S so I decided to visit my friends as well as UNK during my stay. After touring the campus, I absolutely fell in love with the school and decided to transfer the same year in Fall 2019.

I also noticed how a lot of the local residents did not know how to interact with international students as they have never met them or had previous experience of talking to them in their community and vice versa. **This experience made me really motivated to create a safe space for people with different backgrounds that also acted as platform to teach/ learn cultures and traditions from different countries.** I believe that this would give both international and domestic students a chance to learn about each other's differences and promote a campus environment that welcomed everyone. After talking with the diversity and inclusion office on campus, I was able to establish a new student organization called Global Students Association (GSA) which aimed to promote diversity and inclusion on campus while conducting educational activities.



Besides running GSA as the president, I have also been active on other part of campus by being a campus tour guide, chancellor's ambassador, peer advisor at the academic advising, honors program advisory board member, college of business & technology ambassador. I have also been initiated in a business honor society that selects member of the top 10% of the undergraduate students.

During summer, I also got the opportunity to intern at a well-known country club in town which gave me a lot of exposure to what an American work environment looked like. **I was also able to apply all the knowledge that I gained in class practically.** This coming Spring, I have another internship lined up at an Art Center in town where I will be focusing on improving their current management system and strengthening their relationship with the UNK campus. You could do anything if you put your mind to it, and yes, even if you are an international student in a foreign land.



One thing I would advise all future scholars is to try anything and everything you find interesting – even if you believe you might not be able to do it. Trying is better than regretting it later wondering what would have happened if you did. Also, **always remember that while interacting with people, especially those who have a different background and upbringing than you to be respectful and understanding of where they come from.**





Kevin Ngo

Doshisha University (From Portland State University)

I am blessed to have become the first Watanabe scholar in my Home University's history, I will not let the opportunity I have been given wasted—I intend to further U.S-Japan relations by working at an American company in Japan.

I would like to mentor future students with an interest of living in Japan by sharing my experiences: even if it seems affordable, with passion and perseverance a way can be made.

Through programs such as the Watanabe scholarship, there are gracious people in the world who are willing to help.

Some of my fondest memories in Japan were the excursions I was able to make outside of the classroom. During Spring break prior to returning to America, I was able to visit Universal Studios Osaka with a reunion of old friends; generously gathering from across the nation to the Kansai region to see me off. I had previously studied abroad at Aoyama Gakuin University in 2017, and two of my friends from my time there had taken the speed bullet train to spend the day together.

I was also able to reunite with my best friend whom I previously met at my home university in America six years before. In addition, my two international friends Sam from Hong Kong and I day on from Korea—both enrolled in four-year Japanese universities were also in attendance. This trip was so important to me because nobody knew each other: despite every member raised roman especially reserved Asian country background, everyone stepped out of their comfort zones for my sake. I will always treasure my first trip to Universal Studios Japan because of my friends abroad—my greatest treasure.



Kana Takemoto

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

The first year of my doctoral program was generally spent exploring research directions, and my focus has been on classes and projects. A common misconception is that graduate students are always in the lab, sleeping and eating in the lab, and not having any personal life. One major thing that needs to be emphasized more is the fact that those are the kinds of graduate students that may be glamorized but are in fact usually suffering the most from mental health problems and are not actually enjoying their life as a graduate student.

“Studying abroad” comes in many shapes and sizes, but ultimately it only means something if you decide to put value to it under your own terms. In Japan, I found it “easy” to live in society by trying to fit into the norm, as if it was some sort of twisted game as to how I could maximize my productivity or worth by how socially desirable I could be. Leaping outside of that socially imposed comfort zone means having to rewrite the boundaries by yourself, and it means taking responsibility for your own future and not falling back into old habits or what you think is expected of you. **But every time I look back on the person that I was 5 years ago, or even 1 year ago, I am such a different person now, and that gives me hope.** I am accomplishing so much of what the younger version of myself dreamed of one day doing and have put myself in situations that I couldn’t have even imagined.

Studying abroad, to me, means putting yourself in a situation where you say “yes” to the opportunities that may scare you at first, and saying “no” to things that don’t serve you a purpose anymore. **Within the past year, I have learned to look at my life in more multi-dimensional way, instead of a linear progress scale; change still scares me, but growth is always exciting,** and I look forward to being able to share my journey with the Watanabe Scholarship program that has always supported me through my decisions.





Mao Yasueda
Mount Holyoke College (degree-seeking)

Experience leaving the country I have grown up in for my entire life and starting a new life in the US was full of challenges and unexpected learning opportunities. From getting a new phone number to getting along with the roommate, I realized that turning a "new" place into a familiar place begins with knowing my capacity appropriately.

I learned that management skill is to communicate with those around me and solve things one by one without overstretching my capacity.

I need to verbalize what is comfortable for me and be honest about what I find uncomfortable, rather than waiting for the other person to guess. Otherwise, I might reach the limit of your emotional capacity and hurt them more than necessary.

I appreciate that MHC tried best to balance the student life and covid-19 protection. Thanks to that, I was able to talk with peers across different majors and broadened my interests. Moreover, I participated in choir and flute choir both once in a week and played music with students from 1st year to 4th year. It was a good opportunity to connect with people across the class year and sometimes senior students told me recommendations for class and professor. Around Christmas, I played flute as a flute choir at church in my college!

Now I am planning to apply to a PhD program after graduating from MHC, and aspiring to be a researcher in computational neuroscience. This summer, I honorably took part in a research internship program at Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, and analyzed the mice behavioral data using reinforcement learning. The opportunity to work in computational neuroscience research, which I had always dreamed of, and the conversations I had with many PhD students and interns from around the world, made me willing to continue to be involved in academic research after graduating from university.

Lastly, I sincerely appreciate generous financial support and tight community support from the U.S-Japan Council to allow me to immerse myself in my academic studies. **I will continue to make efforts in academics, research, and student life, to become a well-rounded researcher.**



Photo Collage

