



2022-2023

WATANABE SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

U.S.-Japan Council

Generously Supported by the Toshizo Watanabe Endowed Scholarship Fund

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Executive Summary

Upon overcoming a global pandemic, we are extremely pleased to have supported a total of 40 scholars (23 Japanese and 17 American) for the 2022-2023 academic cycle, the scholarship's sixth cohort. The scholars' bios can be found online [here](#).

From October 27 to 28, 2022, 12 American students who were studying abroad in Japan gathered in Shibuya, Tokyo to attend the USJC Annual Conference and leadership training. At the TOMODACHI Next Generation Summit, which was conducted as a part of the Annual Conference, two Watanabe Scholarship alumni spoke as TOMODACHI Regional Leaders and shared their experiences from studying abroad, as well as their career path after graduating from their universities. The scholars also interacted with other Japanese and American students and young professionals. They learned how to build their network and fully immersed themselves with the Annual Conference participants, which was attended by over 700 American and Japanese leaders.



The Watanabe Scholars were deeply moved by Mr. Watanabe's speech at the Annual Conference and expressed their sincere gratitude for being a Watanabe Scholar at the debriefing session. The scholars also shared that being able to network with many people and connecting with Japanese students through leadership training, as well as getting to know their cohorts, were truly meaningful for their study abroad experience.

During the Annual Conference, these 12 Watanabe Scholars attended a dinner with Mr. Watanabe, Ms. Suzanne Basalla (USJC President and CEO), and Ms. Susan Morita (Vice Chair, USJC Board of Directors), in addition to meeting with ten Watanabe Scholarship alumni at a casual dinner.





From February 24 to 26, 2022, 24 Watanabe Scholars from the United States and Japan gathered in Los Angeles for a Leadership Weekend.

During the course of this leadership training, we welcomed USJC Associates Micheal Sueoka (SteadyMD, ELP '17), Kenyon Mayeda (TDW+Co, ELP '12) and Mia Russell (Japanese American National Museum, ELP '22) who shared their

respective career journeys with the Watanabe Scholars while touching on a variety of topics, including taking risks early in one's career, the importance of networking, mental health, and celebrating the little things over the course of their careers. The Watanabe Scholars also had an opportunity to interact with former Watanabe Scholarship recipients Sakura Hoshi, Masumi Abe, and Miho Namba, who shared their experiences obtaining jobs in the United States. The highlight was meeting with Mr. Watanabe in person, who walked the students through a visualization exercise that culminated in the students sharing their goals and dreams with their cohorts.



The program wrapped up with a presentation by Council Leader Mitch Maki (Go for Broke National Education Center) and a visit to the Japanese American National Museum, both of which gave the Watanabe Scholars an opportunity to learn more about the Japanese American internment experience and history.



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 Japanese audiences, since resources for study abroad scholarships seem to be limited.

In September 2022, team member Kana Takagi attended EducationUSA Tokyo, which is a study abroad fair hosted by the U.S. Embassy in 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. The fair had over 260 prospective applicants.



In November 2022, then Program Manager Grace Kim conducted a promotion tour in Japan and visited Hokkaido University, Kobe University, the Okayama Prefectural Government, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The administrators and staff were interested in learning more about the application process and eligibility so that they could share the opportunity with as many students as possible.

We are grateful to the Toshizo 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 Japanese and American students who plan to study abroad. We would also like to thank Mr. Watanabe for making the time for the Annual Conference and leadership trainings. We look forward to the continued success of the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship Program. We hope you enjoy this report and thank you once again.

Sincerely,
Izumi Swarts
Program Manager

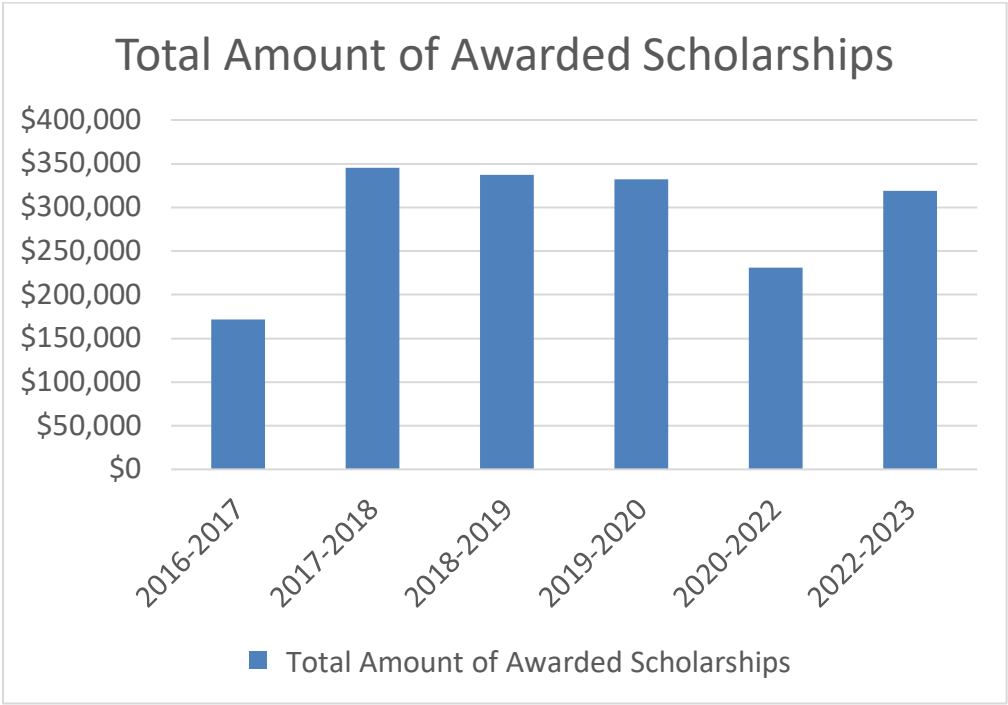
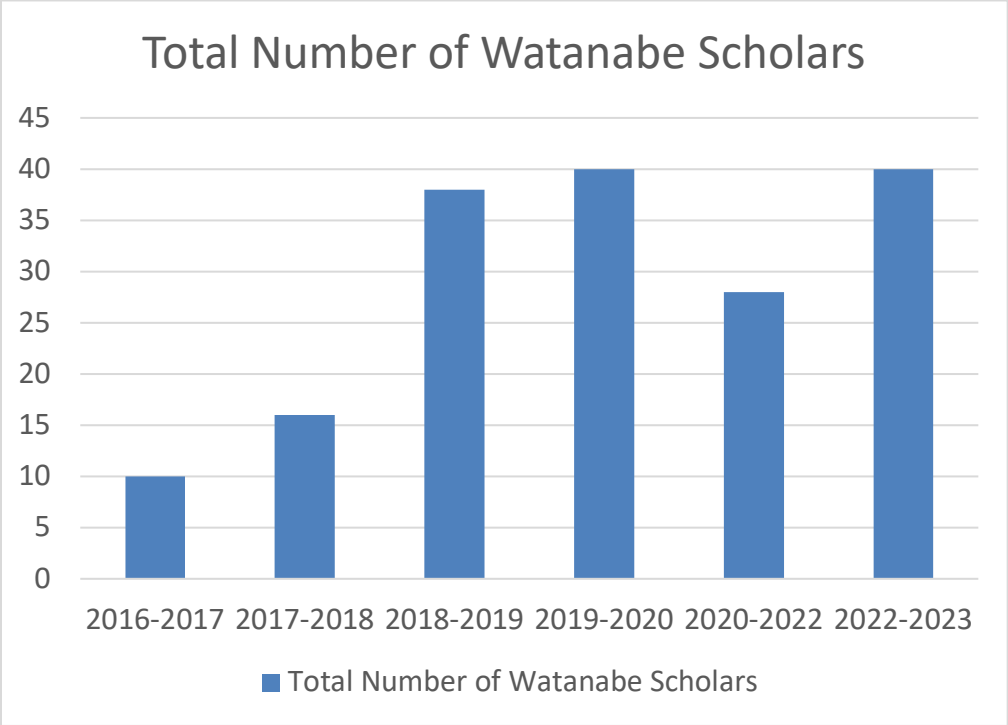
About the Toshizo Watanabe Study Abroad Scholarship Program

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 (the Council) makes it possible to award scholarships to Japanese and American students with leadership potential 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. 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



2022-2023 Watanabe Scholars' School List

Japanese Scholars Studied at...

- American Film Institute
- Bates College
- Boston University
- Brandeis University
- Brown University
- Dartmouth College
- Georgia State University
- Grinnell College
- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- Johns Hopkins University
- Lane Community College
- McKendree University
- Minerva University
- Smith College
- Stanford University
- Temple University

- University of California, Berkeley
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of Chicago
- University of North Carolina
Wilmington
- University of West Alabama
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Williams Collage

Their Home Schools included...

(For those on exchange programs)

- Keio University
- Musashi University
- Nihon University
- Osaka University
- Waseda University

American Scholars Studied at...

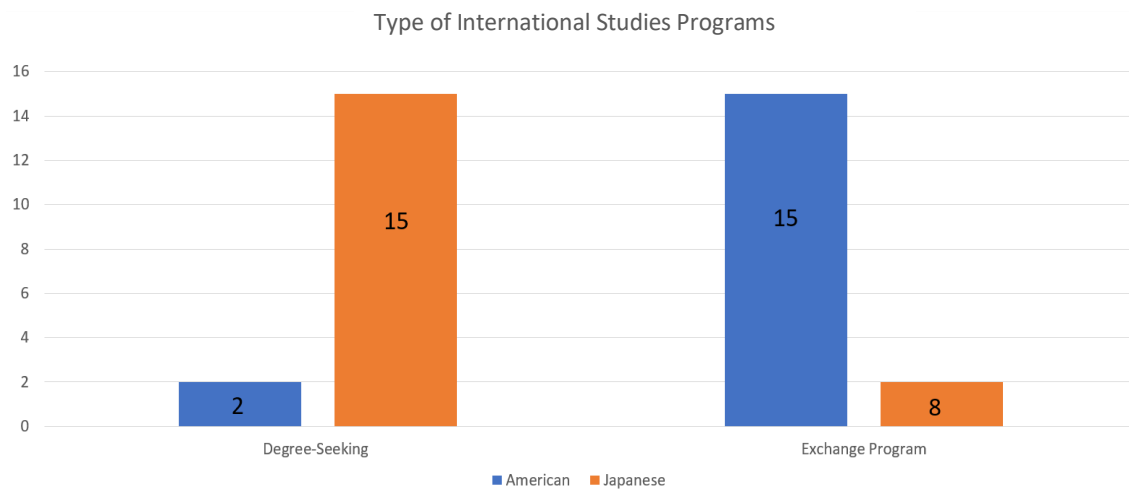
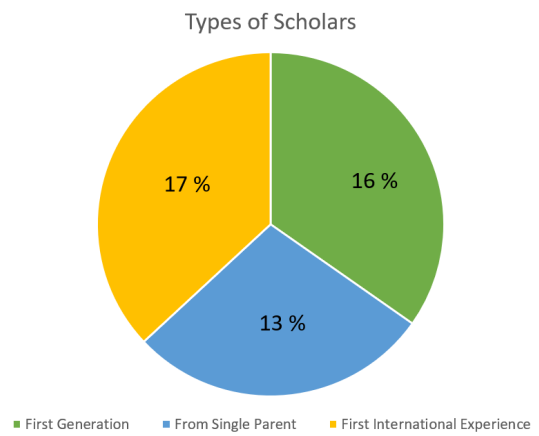
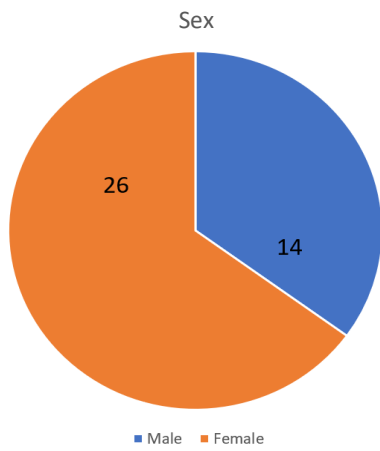
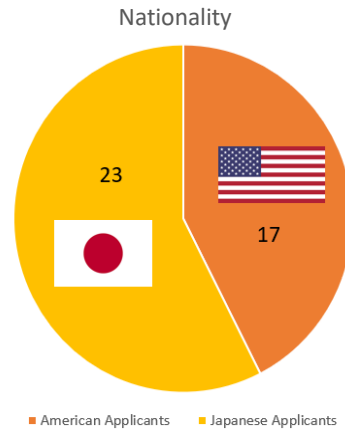
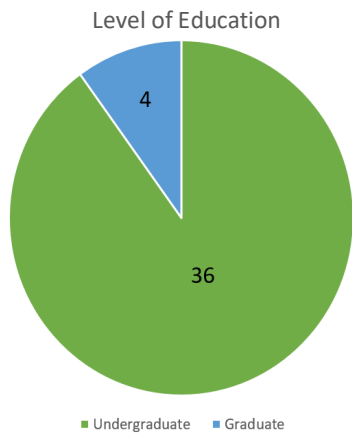
- Graduate School of International
Cooperation Studies (GSICS), Kobe
University
- Hokkaido University
- International Christian University
- Kansai Gaidai University
- Kwansei Gakuin University
- Osaka Gakuin University
- Ritsumeikan University
- Temple University Japan
- Toyo University
- Waseda University

Their Home Schools included...

(For those on exchange programs)

- Appalachian State University
- California State University Channel
Islands
- California State University Monterey
Bay
- DePaul University
- Drake University
- Edmonds College
- Missouri State University
- Randolph-Macon College
- Siena College
- Temple University
- University of Connecticut
- University of Maryland, College Park
- University of Massachusetts Amherst
- University of Michigan - Ann Arbor

2022-2023 Scholars At-A-Glance



Watanabe Scholars Highlights



Gota Akagiri

McKendree University (Degree-Seeking)

While I studied abroad in the United States, I gained experience that makes me blown away. I couldn't have got it if I have attended a college in Japan. Thanks to the Watanabe scholarship, I am able to realize my studying abroad in the United States and expand my perspective largely by reconsidering how invaluable studying abroad is, facing myself to understand who I am, and refining my skills for my career goal.

Personally, the meaning of the chance to do studying abroad for me changed as I studied on an American college campus. Before I started to study abroad in the United States, I thought that it would be putting myself in a challenging environment where the culture is different from my home, and people around me would be so friendly and outgoing that even if I stay passive, I could be able to be socialized with others. However, a couple of weeks after the first semester began, I noticed that in order to realize what I want to try, I have to consider what I need and take action. I believe excusing myself for being introverted because of my mental barrier caused by cultural differences and expecting other people's help too much would ruin the chance to change myself. I learn that, for me, studying abroad is described as being active and making a big step in a challenging situation by utilizing all opportunities that I could never get if I were in Japan. Personally, the chance to study abroad in the United States means trying to put aside the existing character I'd like to change and take a step forward in the challenging environment to try what I've never experienced in Japan.

The experience in the United States impacted my career goal in the future by making my passion for my dream stronger. My long-term goal is to become an official staffer specializing in urban planning at the International Organization to design livable cities in devolving countries. By thinking about what the chance to do study abroad in the United States has meant to me personally and academically, I realize it is an invaluable experience. My mental change through studying abroad made it easy to be myself and express originality, which helps me to face myself to understand who I am. The experience of studying abroad impacted my career objectives by reconsidering and updating my short-term goals to refine my skills to achieve my long-term goals in the future. I'm deeply grateful to the donor U.S.-Japan council and Mr. Toshizo Watanabe from the bottom of my heart.



Sabrina Alcin
Waseda University (Exchange)

Exploring different places, whether it be the classroom, a walk to seven eleven, a new cafe, or an entirely different prefecture each experience will forever be ingrained in my brain. Personally, given the opportunity to study abroad has made me more eager to travel to other countries to learn about their culture and lifestyles. Although America is a melting pot of different cultures I never took the time to go out, explore, and learn about new things. I preferred to stay in my comfort zone. But after coming to Japan that has completely changed.

I have grown not only as a student but as a person who is confident to take a step out of my comfort zone and take the time to enjoy the things around me. Even with the many surprises I've encountered while in Japan I'm glad I had the chance to experience it. Personally, being exposed to a different culture allowed me to become more adaptable. If I was able to navigate in a foreign country I know that my future is limitless. On the academic level being able to attend such a prestigious university allowed me the opportunity to learn from high-level professors and engage with other students from different backgrounds than me, this ultimately enhanced my creativity and problem-solving skills. The advice I want to share with future Watanabe Scholars is firstly stepping out of your comfort zone. Luckily wanting to study abroad in Japan already is the first step, but being open-minded to new experiences and unexpected encounters will lead to personal growth. Also, another piece of advice is learning the language, even if you're not fluent having studied Japanese beforehand greatly helped me in certain situations. Lastly, taking initiative. Coming from someone who tends to go with the flow. Taking the initiative benefited me so much. I went out of my way to attend workshops, practice my Japanese with strangers, and joined clubs, and by doing this I was able to make the most out of my time while I was in Japan, while creating long-lasting connections. Being a Watanabe Scholar has been a great honor, and I'm glad I was selected to receive this scholarship. Not only did it provide financial support but it also allowed me to connect with other Watanabe scholars who see the importance of cultural exchange, and I even had the pleasure of reconnecting with some scholars while being in Japan. But overall, studying abroad has been a life-changing experience for me that I will always remember.



Emily Argust
Kansai Gaidai University (Exchange)

Every day I lived in Japan was a journey. Even the days which I barely left my room were a journey as I learned new things about myself that I'm not sure I would have learned otherwise. My time in Japan really opened my eyes to how much I have learned and how much more there is still left to learn about.

My time in Japan had many ups and downs. Traveling and seeing so many new places was really something special to me. But on the other hand it brought many lows as I questioned my capabilities in my studies as well as the connections I was making. At first it was hard making friends as none of the Japanese students were going to be on campus until April and I tend to be a very shy person at first. I tend to let things build up emotionally until I hit a breaking point. But I can honestly say that my trip to Mount Hiei, even though it was a school field trip and I was learning the whole time I was there, hit a reset button in me. I felt inspired to continue going out and reach out to more people. I felt like for the first time since stepping off that plane in Japan that I could breathe. I knew before even leaving for Japan that I was going to have good days and bad days. That is just a part of study abroad. Nothing is always just a good thing. Even though many of the things I brought back were from my travels a lot of things were also from my classes. I loved all the classes I took in Japan. I took a ceramics class while I was in Japan and that was so much fun. The professor was amazing. He did a wonderful job of teaching us while also letting us explore things on our own and learn a few things about ourselves along the way. I felt like I was learning about the true Japan by being in the country rather than reading about it in a book as if it were a tale about some far away land. While in Japan I knew I was learning a lot, but it wasn't until I returned home and helped at the Virginia Governor's Japanese Academy that it became prevalent just how much I had learned. I was a staff member last year at the academy, but this year I felt like I knew so much more. I was able to answer questions about Japanese culture that I would have never been able to answer had I not visited Japan.

I came to college never thinking about studying Japanese, and now I've lived in Japan for a semester of my already shorted college career as I am graduating early in December. I will continue studying Japanese after graduation as my goal is to be able to go back to Japan and visit all the places I wasn't able to before during my study abroad. But this time I want to be better at Japanese. I want to hold the confidence to carry a conversation with native speakers. But that will have to be later in life. In another chapter later in my life's story. I'm still learning who I am, but my time in Japan has helped me discover more pieces that make up who I am.



Kanon Aso
Boston University (Exchange)

The most significant value I gained from studying abroad is the importance of becoming a person who is accepted in the places and environments I want to be in. Although I didn't have prior overseas experience, I did achieve the result of passing the selection process for the exchange program within the university, and I had more confidence in my English proficiency compared to those around me. However, upon arriving at the destination, I was surprised by my own

inadequacy in English. Inability to communicate effectively in English leads to difficulties in establishing connections.

Lacking effective communication skills also translates into an inability to showcase my strengths and personality, which often led me to experience significant stress when engaging in English conversations with others. During that time, I went through a phase where I felt uncomfortable with interpersonal communication. I began to think about what kind of friends would make me happy if I were a local student hosting exchange students and what kind of people I would want to be friends with. This shift in perspective made me realize that what matters most is not just how fluently you can speak English, but rather the character, vibe, and the desire to build relationships with others. With this insight, I gradually overcame the stress of speaking English and started conversing more without being overly concerned about grammar mistakes or pronunciation.

During my study abroad, in terms of academic achievements, I attended Boston University and focused on courses related to media communication during the fall semester. Since I had a broad interest in various forms of media, I took classes in mass communication, journalism, film, and television, exploring multiple areas within the media field. challenges such as the difficulty of communicating in English, inconveniences in the dormitory, and managing my well-being in an unfamiliar environment. In academics as well, I encountered struggles such as not being able to fully capitalize on valuable opportunities despite receiving them, and being overwhelmed by the volume of assignments. As a result, since returning to my home country, I feel that the barriers to taking on challenges have significantly lowered.

My current ultimate dream is to spread entertainment, including Japanese music, to the world. While studying abroad, I felt that Japanese manga and anime were highly recognized. However, on the other hand, I also feel that aspects of Japanese popular culture such as music are not well acknowledged.





Hiroshi Azuma
Johns Hopkins University (Degree-Seeking)

Having already completed my psychiatry residency in Japan, my study abroad happened at a later stage of life than most Watanabe Scholars.

One thing I realized was how the social discourse is different in the U.S. and Japan. My classmates were very passionate about making changes in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The content and tone of the discussion significantly differed from what I had been used to in Japan, and I was fascinated by the discussion. I conducted a qualitative research project to investigate the discussion more deeply. It's been great to hear people's stories! I chose Johns Hopkins University partly because it is located in Baltimore, not in Boston or New York. As I had hoped, living in this city allowed me to learn about aspects of the U.S. I didn't know about. For example, on the very first day of our master's program, one of the speakers at the orientation told us how Johns Hopkins is built on the exploitation of primarily African American neighboring communities. It is historical and current, though the university is trying to fix it. "Black Butterfly" describes the racial demographic of Baltimore, where Black communities spread in the west and east of the city, while the city's center is primarily White. As public health focuses on the health and lives of vulnerable and marginalized individuals, it is essential to be cognizant of these social and historical backgrounds. Studying public health in the city of Baltimore was a vivid experience.

Being a Watanabe Scholar was an amazing part of my study in the U.S. My MPH program has this (a bit weird) policy that "if you have external funding, you are more likely to receive an institutional scholarship from the university." In fact, only a few days after I notified the school that I was chosen as a Watanabe Scholar, the university increased the amount of institutional scholarship by the exact same amount as that of Watanabe. These "double" financial aids eased my burden tremendously, especially because we suffered from a weaker yen. In addition, Watanabe Leadership Weekend was another perk of being a Watanabe Scholar. I connected with other Scholars in different schools and with different interests, and the vibrant Japanese American community around Los Angeles. Learning about Japanese Americans' experiences of internment touched me emotionally.





Rebekah Blume
Waseda University (Exchange)

Things started off shaky for me when I first entered Japan as I struggled to make it to my dorm with an abundance of luggage, by metro. If it were not for a kind old man who saw me exhaustedly making my way down the street, I am not sure that I would have made it to my dorm at all. This experience solidified for me just how kind of a country Japan can be. My experience abroad was overall a very exciting and rewarding time; not only did I improve my Japanese tremendously in speaking and listening, but I also began working on one of my future dreams of being a singer in Japan.

I had been waiting for seven years to return to Japan after my first time abroad when I was 15, and I will be forever grateful to the Bridging Scholarship for granting me the chance to go again. One of my personal goals was to make a lot of Japanese friends as I would not really have the opportunity in the United States, and I did successfully make a few. It was very difficult for many reasons, but mostly because of the language barrier and cultural differences. The main way that I made friends is by joining circles and I chose all music circles so that I could get singing performance experience. It was perhaps the most exciting part of my time here; I love singing but had never done it in front of a crowd before and loved getting to be a part of multiple bands and singing various genres of music. I recommend that everyone make friends from circles because you can easily find people with shared interests.

Some of the most important advice that I can give to anyone planning to study abroad, to Japan or anywhere else, is to make sure you are mentally well enough to live in a foreign country, especially if you already suffer from mental health problems. I suffer from PTSD, BPD, anxiety and depression all of which I was being treated for in the United States. Please make sure to put your health first in every situation. Japan is not going anywhere and if you need to take time to get treatment and heal before doing something as life changing and stressful as being abroad, it is best to make that decision, no matter how difficult. I felt that my mental health was in a decent place but the stress of being abroad exacerbated symptoms of my illness which is something that everyone needs to keep in mind.

Even with the problems I encountered, I do not regret going to Japan, I just think it was not the right time. In the end, I still have a lot of good memories and still have plans to return to live out my dreams of being a singer. My favorite memories will always be the time I spent with friends, my performances and going to rock concerts. My plans after graduating are to return to Japan as an English teacher and continue to work on my career.



Ashley Cunningham
Tokyo University (Exchange)

To begin, I would like to give a big thank you to all of those involved with this scholarship. All of the experiences and opportunities that were available were because of the generosity and hard work of the Toshizo Watanabe Scholarship Team. Since September, I have seen myself grow tremendously in many ways. For example, I have become more confident in myself and my ability to be independent in stressful situations.

Being a Watanabe Scholar has meant everything to me on this exchange. I met many other friends through the TOMODACHI Initiative and the USJC Annual Conference, which has changed the course of my future. My time in Japan has also improved my Japanese speaking skills, which was my goal and my dream after three years of deferral. It has also sparked more of a passion for Japan, as I plan on returning next year. I gained more independence, as it was my first time using the train system, buying groceries every month, budgeting, and speaking a different language every day. I feel more confident and optimistic about my future. This could not have been done without the kindness and efforts of the Watanabe Scholarship Team. Therefore, after my exchange program, I am now working on my next steps in coming back to Japan to do international relations or interpretation work, including potential positions with the JET Program or at the USJC. When I return to Springfield, I want to continue to practice Japanese with members of the Sister Cities of Springfield Organization and to inspire other MSU students to study abroad by giving a presentation.

My advice is to try to learn at least survival Japanese before arriving. It will help you in times of need and will make processes go much more smoothly. It is a beautiful language, so if you have more spare time to learn, conversational Japanese will help you make many friends that you were not expecting. In my experience, Japanese students are shy to speak English, but if you make an effort to speak a little Japanese, they feel really happy and excited. Bridging the gap first is so important to making meaningful connections.



Savanna Fortlage
Kansai Gaidai University (Exchange)

Before I studied abroad, I considered myself someone who kept to themselves. Communicating with people was often difficult for me (language barrier or otherwise), and the fear of making mistakes often prevented me from taking advantage of opportunities which presented themselves. Once I got to Japan, the fresh start which it presented was both freeing and overwhelming: I was free to reinvent myself, but far away from the people and support structures I am used to. I was in a dorm of other international students, and am so grateful that we all got put together. Towards the end of the semester, I signed up for an English talk event with high schoolers who were applying to Kansai Gaidai. There was one person who was uneasy at the prospect of speaking English, so we spoke Japanese instead and they opened up. They asked me something which made me pause: “How do you get the confidence to speak Japanese, even though you’re learning it?” While the question stumped me for a minute, my answer came quite naturally, as if it was in the back of my head all along: “You have to know that you will mess up, and it’s ok when you do. No one is fluent in a language immediately, and you shouldn’t let the fear of making mistakes keep you from learning and practicing.” This was simultaneously a message to myself, which I had been unconsciously practicing since I had got to Japan and only then consciously realized. My academic plans for the future were heavily influenced by my time in Japan. In my classes at Kansai Gaidai, I got a survey of East Asian film and literature, with a special focus on Japan. I am grateful I took those classes, because many subject areas I studied were too niche to be offered at my home university. Without the Foundation’s support, I would not have had the chance to study abroad, and by extension, develop personally, interpersonally, and academically. All communication I have had with the staff has been timely and informative, and all the interfaces provided have worked well. The Watanabe Scholars Virtual Program was both pragmatic in its approach and easy to comprehend and navigate.





Shohta Fujii
American Film Institute (Degree-Seeking)

First of all, this experience of studying abroad for filmmaking is an opportunity of a lifetime for me. It is an experience that can transform my life and broaden my horizons. As a filmmaker, studying abroad helped me develop my skills, gain valuable industry knowledge, and create connections that will last a lifetime.

One more difference I noticed is the role of a cinematographer. The Japanese cinematographers do not talk about the story. In contrast, American cinematographers are expected to talk about story and input their viewpoint to develop material with a director. I was thinking that the difference between the Japanese cinematographers and the American one comes from technical understanding, however, the true difference comes from a deep understanding of the story and how to capture the story in visually. Language of Cinematography is the most favorite class during those two terms. Hana Kitasei, a teacher in the class, taught us 3 important things to be a better cinematographer who can contribute to storytelling. The first one is that we have to improve our skills to describe an image. The second one I learned is a feedback loop a cinematographer can use. The third one is that viewers change where to see based on information they get in advance.

I would like to use my connection and learning to improve the Japanese filmmaking industry.

I already set up a couple of meetings with teachers in AFI and a Japanese film director who wants to learn their system. They were all welcome to give their experience and knowledge to him and I learnt a lot through the meetings too. We are going to see a couple of producers working on Netflix and Abema TV in a few weeks to share what we learn in the States.

Lastly, the scholarship helped me achieve my long-term career goals by allowing me to pursue my studies with greater ease and comfort. It is incredibly meaningful to me that the committee recognized my academic and personal achievements and chose me for this scholarship. Again, I would like to thank you and the entire scholarship committee for selecting me for this scholarship. I am grateful for the opportunity to pursue my academic goals with greater ease.





Yuichi Fukunaga
Williams College (Degree-Seeking)

The opportunity to study and conduct research in one of the United States' most challenging academic environments has allowed me to nurture my knowledge, evolve my perspectives, and prepare myself for the vibrant career that lies ahead. The academic rigor at Williams College pushed me to delve deeper into my major, Neuroscience, pushing my intellectual boundaries, and sparking a fervor for research. This dedication bore fruit as I was bestowed with the Highest Honor in Neuroscience, an achievement I hold dear. Additionally, I was recognized as the top student in the neuroscience department at commencement, a testament to the diligent pursuit of my academic goals. These accolades were not simply academic achievements but milestones that validated my hard work and commitment to my chosen field. Perhaps the most unexpected yet exhilarating outcome of my time at Williams was the birth of a synthetic biology startup that I co-founded with a friend. This venture, which started as passionate discussions about a shared idea in our dorm rooms, has evolved into a viable business. The transition from being students discussing an invention to running a corporation is a unique experience that has instilled in me a sense of entrepreneurship. Our work now has the potential to impact society significantly, making us realize the power of innovation and the responsibility it carries. In the whirlwind of academic triumphs and entrepreneurial adventures, the most significant transformation I experienced was personal. The knowledge and skills I acquired at Williams College and the experiences I gathered have prepared me to advance my career further. I am now ready to delve into neuroscience research at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Germany and explore business development strategies at my startup. This dual passion—to advance the field of neuroscience and to make a significant societal impact through my biotech startup—is the driving force as I step into my future. Studying internationally in the U.S. has been a rewarding and enlightening experience. The cultural diversity and complexity of the U.S., as experienced through my interactions with friends and professors at Williams, broadened my perspectives significantly. From my experience, I learned that understanding a society's complexity requires a first-hand experience, a realization that would have been challenging to acquire had I remained in Japan, a country where homogeneity is more prevalent. These interactions and experiences have left an indelible mark, enriching my global understanding. Being a Watanabe Scholar has instilled in me a sense of responsibility to give back. My dream is to one day be in a position where I can provide scholarships for future students, nurturing their academic growth just as the Watanabe Scholarship did for me. The Watanabe Scholarship has been more than just financial support; it has been a catalyst for my growth, encouraging me to delve deeper into my academic pursuits and explore new horizons.





Hannah Fulton
Ritsumeikan University (Exchange)

The chance to do study abroad has meant the absolute world to me, as it has been my dream to not only be able to visit and live in Japan, but to also be able to study abroad and live in a different country, since I was about 12 years old, so it has been my dream and goal for over 10 years now. Having grown up in a low-income household, I didn't really have many opportunities to leave my state, much less leave the country. This was only amplified when the pandemic happened, as I was just transferring to my university so that I could continue to study Japanese and study abroad through my school, so when the exchange program kept getting canceled and delayed, I began to lose hope of ever being able to make it to Japan. However, when it was allowed again, and especially due to receiving this scholarship, was when I realized that my dreams were actually coming true and I would be able to live the life I had always envisioned.

I feel like I have changed in multiple ways, as now I have less anxiety, and more self-confidence, thanks to having to go through difficult challenges. I feel that these are skills that one can truly hone when living abroad in a different country, especially by yourself. Studying internationally in Japan has felt like being in an entirely different world, as so many things are entirely different, but it has truly been the best experience for me, and I am actually very happy and glad that it is so different from what I have been used to my entire life. One thing that I had the chance to do that I never anticipated and expected, was being able to meet and have dinner with a geisha. I had learned about the history of geisha before coming here, but always knew that it was very private now and very expensive to even be able to see one in real life, so I was not expecting to be able to meet with one. However, thanks to my professor of the wagashi class I had taken, I was able to join a dinner with him, my fellow classmates, and two geisha at a very private izakaya in January. I feel incredibly blessed and honored to have been able to sit next to, speak with, and even play drinking games with an incredibly beautiful geisha. It is truly a memorable experience that I will never ever forget.





Jazmine Guzman
Kwansei Gakuin University (Exchange)

Studying in Japan was an entirely different experience than studying in the United States. The duration of each of my classes was also longer than I was used to, as each class period typically lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes. In the U.S., my classes have both a lecture and discussion component that counts towards my overall grade. My classes in Japan, however, emphasized lectures over group discussion, and I found that I had to shift the way I absorbed the lecture information in order to succeed as a student.

No matter where in Japan they are located, I highly suggest future Watanabe Scholars make an attempt to visit as many different areas of Japan as possible. I have no regrets from my time in Japan precisely because I made the time and effort to visit as many regions of Japan as I could. Different cities will offer different things to do, and visiting different regions will lead to varied experiences. Wearing and walking around in a kimono in Kyoto was a more beautiful experience than doing it in Tokyo. The art museums in Osaka were fun, but my visit to the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima was especially memorable. I learned so much about Japan outside of the classroom by taking a bus or a train to a new location. My semester in Japan has been one of the most enriching experiences I have had because I sought out and experienced the regional diversity of Japan in conjunction with my university studies. Japan is far away from the U.S. and it can be difficult to physically engage in the language and culture after coming home. As a Mexican American, it is especially important for me to share my experience in Japan with my university community and my Hispanic community which goes beyond verbal storytelling. Being a Watanabe Scholar has been an incredible experience, as it has developed me academically, but also professionally while attending the U.S.-Japan Council 2023 Annual Conference in Tokyo. I met a number of amazing people, both Japanese and American, that created an everlasting imprint on my perspective on the future of U.S.-Japan relations.





Reina Haga
Temple University (Exchange)

This study abroad meant to me a lot because I got to study at Temple University where they provided a gender study course that teaches about the LGBTQIA community. This is very new in the world. Since the final goal of my life is “Make same-sex marriage legal in Japan” I realized that I need to study their community and history behind their back. Then, I noticed that my university does not offer classes that discover this topic. Therefore, I decided to go to a university in another country where they have classes related to my interest. Since I met many people who have clear goals or they know what they want to do, I was motivated and learned from them. I would say those are my biggest changes by comparing me before studying abroad.

Studying in the United States as Japanese, I realized students in the class are very different compared to Japan. For instance, in Japanese style, the professor talks most of the time and all students are quiet the whole lecture while students in the US, share their opinion a lot. No matter how big is the class, it’s always discussion style. Taking those kinds of classes, I learned if you are not saying anything in the class, you are not attending or exiting the class. This encourages me to always have my opinions.

I did the presentation about my study abroad at my university. I am currently a finalist in a contest at my university called the pheasant contest. So, I am thinking to share my experiences in the US to motivate other people to go to study abroad.

My experiences in the US help me to do something new. They changed the way of thinking about living one life. Because I tried so many things in the US such as joining a club, taking classes that never learned before, going to a new place, and meeting new people. In my way, it is worst if you do not take action and regret it. If I think that this will be something, I always do it before I worry about it. Therefore, I get a lot of opportunities after I change my way of thinking and taking action. I am currently doing challenging stuff such as participating in a contest and doing an internship. I am still working on these, so it is not clear the result but I am pretty sure these events would impact me and help me to make my goal come true.

To become a different person, try everything you want and make a lot of mistakes. When I came back from the US, my friend said to me “I can tell your face is different. You changed a lot.” I did not notice but other people realized. Since I am not afraid of making mistakes, I do everything that I want. So, I do not have any regrets in the US. This changed me a lot.





Kolby Hart
Temple University Japan (Exchange)

My name is Kolby Hart and I am a Watanabe Scholar. In the fall of 2022 I made the decision to attend Temple University Japan, almost entirely on a whim. At least that is what I tell myself. Truthfully, I always wanted to visit Japan and speak Japanese daily, and it just took the disconnection of the experience from the workload to get me to be able to go to Japan. Studying abroad at first was a means to leave my home country, and gain new perspectives through the act of seeing the world up close and as it is. Not seeing it as a tourist world, but as a local who lives there would. Many people in my program were at a different part of their lives, and I felt too old, and too disconnected. But through finally meeting the right people, and pushing myself to go out of the comfort zone I had lived in, I met friends who were so real that spending time with them is more fun than anything else. They helped me learn Japanese, helped me grow personally, and taught me that two is better than one... or in our case, nine is better than one.

I went into this experience looking for something completely different than what I came out with. Yes certainly, I learned the language. I feel much better suited to traveling around the world to foreign places. And of course I feel much better accepting that things are different around the world, and it's unfair to look at the world through the lens of only your home country. You have to see the world on the ground, in person. But what really sticks out is the football we play while yelling and teasing each other in a mix of Japanese and English. The nights spent barely sleeping, because it's better to be up late together than stuck at home alone. The simple joy of doing homework in the company of others instead of being locked down in your house doing it all alone. Tokyo gets this reputation as being a place where it's difficult to make friends, but if you can leap that hurdle, Tokyo is also the perfect place to build those connections and build something that I truly believe can't be fostered anywhere else.





Paulina Hensley
Waseda University (Exchange)

Personally, this study abroad experience has allowed me to become a more self-reliant, confident individual. Seeing that I could still live my daily life in Japan despite struggling with the language barrier encouraged me to become more resilient and persevere through the language barrier in my daily life in Japan. I have even gained more confidence to challenge myself to do things like go to a movie theater on my own or even treat myself to lunch at a local Japanese restaurant, both of which were things the past me would not even have the courage to do, especially if a language barrier was involved. Academically, I have had the opportunity to take classes in a variety of subjects that my home campus does not offer. Waseda University, my host university, offered classes on Latin American studies, Spanish language and so on, so I wanted to learn about as many cultures as possible while abroad, and even challenge myself to take as many language classes as possible. It has been quite enjoyable to not only take these language classes but meet other students from around the world as well which made even my classroom experience a multicultural experience - something that my home campus can't provide. Once I return, I plan on becoming part of my study abroad department on my campus by either being a student assistant that works in the study abroad department, or even by becoming a member of my campus's study abroad club. I also plan on continuing to be a student peer mentor in my campus's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). The summer before coming to Japan, I had the opportunity to start encouraging my mentees to study abroad by telling them how I applied to and funded my study abroad trip. It was amazing to see how encouraged my mentees were to try and study abroad in the future as well, especially since they come from backgrounds where they didn't see studying abroad as possible due to many different barriers in their education. This experience has not only allowed me to learn a new language but to learn how to communicate with others if I don't know their language. This will greatly help me with my future goals of becoming a nurse because there will be situations where I may not know the main language of one of my patients and I will have to navigate that situation despite having a language barrier.





Ayano Hirose
University of California, Berkeley (Exchange)

The most memorable experience during my study abroad was visiting the Japanese American National Museum as part of the “Watanabe Scholarship Weekend” and listening to a speech by Mr. Mitchell Maki (CEO of the Go for Broke National Education Center). From his speech, I learned about the racial discrimination and hardships that Japanese Americans experienced during and after World War II, and felt that this fact must be passed onto future generations both in Japanese society and in American society.

In order to spread this history and appeal to people for the necessity of eliminating the gross human rights violations, I considered the media to be an effective way. Since I was a member of a UC Berkeley-accredited media organization (CalTV), I decided to make a video which focused on the history of Japanese Americans and the cultural ties between the two countries. I went to the “Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival”, which celebrated the fusion of Japanese and American cultures. In the video, I interviewed Mr. Maki and other cultural figures who serve as bridges between Japan and the United States. The video was viewed more than 1,600 times and I felt a sense of achievement when my American friend told me that she could deeply understand the history of the two countries along with the beauty of Japanese culture after she watched my video.

One important thing that I would like to advise to the next Watanabe Scholars is that “Don’t be afraid of jumping into a new environment and making mistakes. Challenge anything that you are interested in”. It was my first time to study abroad in the United States and I had a great deal of anxiety before the departure. Moreover, when I joined CalTV, there was no foreign student in the club except me. However, by reminding myself to be brave and getting out of my comfort zone, I was able to have a wonderful experience that I will remember for the rest of my life and meet wonderful friends who have the same passion. Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Toshizo Watanabe for providing this scholarship. Furthermore, I appreciate the U.S.-Japan Council for the generous support and the 24 Watanabe Scholars who made my trip to Los Angeles unforgettable.





Akane Hubbard
Osaka Gakuin University (Exchange)

Over the course of four months, not only did I achieve some of my critical language study goals, but I grew in ways I never could have imagined. Before I even left the country, however, I was given the opportunity to learn about and contextualize the U.S.-Japan relationship. I was able to virtually participate in the 2023 Next Generation Summit, titled “The New Age of Leadership,” in which I heard distinguished alumni of the TOMODACHI generation and guests speak about their experiences furthering the U.S.-Japan relationship. We heard from leaders across diverse sectors ranging from diplomatic relations to social work. Through the engaging personal testimonials, I gained an understanding of how the work of U.S.-Japan cross-cultural connection, understanding, and collaboration is important across the board. I was unable to engage in-person with the panelists, but thanks to innovative techniques like graphic recording (pictorial hand-drawn notes), I still felt intellectually involved in the seminar. In addition to the Next Generation Summit, the Watanabe Scholarship team was kind enough to recommend educational resources to contextualize the work of the USJC and the goals of the Watanabe Scholarship. Two key aspects of the virtual curriculum were the history of Japanese American internment in the U.S. and the past and present accomplishments of Japanese Americans. In particular, I was grateful to learn about the history of Japanese American internment in World War II. While I myself am Japanese American, my mother moved to the U.S. less than thirty years ago. I felt that I lacked the keen awareness of the historical discrimination against Japanese Americans that other Japanese Americans hold. I have a strong connection to both Japanese and American culture, but my family’s experience does not speak to the past struggles of being Japanese in America. It was very important to me to acknowledge and honor that history, such that it may never happen again. The virtual programming for the Watanabe Scholarship not only taught me valuable history, but inspired me to act as an advocate for the Japanese American community in both the U.S. and Japan.

Placed into the advanced Japanese class, I studied not only the foundations of the Japanese language, but discussed politics, current events, history, and culture with my classmates and Japanese volunteers. Studying abroad is a short period of time in which you have the unique opportunity of being a young, curious, open-minded student ready to interact fully with another culture.





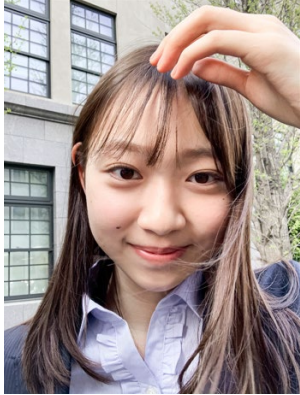
Sena Ihara
University of Wisconsin-Madison (Exchange)

“What has being a Watanabe Scholar meant to me?” The question has lingered in my thoughts since receiving the prestigious scholarship. Undoubtedly, the financial support and the opportunity to study at a renowned university were invaluable, but in retrospect, the Watanabe Scholarship offered much more than mere monetary assistance. Looking back, being a Watanabe Scholar meant embodying the qualities of a global leader with the spirit to challenge and foster an alliance between

Japan and the US.

During my study abroad program, I had the chance to engage in a volunteer activity, supporting local American students in learning Japanese. Initially, the activity had only 10 members, barely half of the classroom’s capacity. The limited theme and repetitive content were the cause for the limited participation. As a Japanese student, I was nominated as the leader of the volunteer group, and my mission was to expand the club to 20 members. At first, I felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities that came with managing the activity – reserving a classroom, organizing events, preparing presentations, and providing materials for each member. Faced with the challenges, I even considered resigning as the leader within a few months. However, I had the privilege of conversing with Suzanne, the president of USJC in February. Our discussion centered around the true essence of leadership. As the president, she embodies more than just a presentation of the relationship between Japan and the US, she also excels in supporting her teammates. Through this experience, I came to realize that a global leader is not merely someone who leads and represents a team but also someone who supports and uplifts others. Being a Watanabe Scholar has taught me the importance of perseverance and determination in pursuing my goals. As a result, I successfully expanded the classroom to 20 members. It was a gratifying experience to witness the club’s growth and diversity, knowing that I played a part in fostering an environment where student from different backgrounds could come together to learn and bond over the Japanese language. As a Watanabe Scholar, I was able to demonstrate the qualities of a global leader, embracing diversity and inclusivity. The club’s expansion not only enriches the experience for its members but also demonstrated the spirit of collaboration and alliance between Japan and the US that the scholarship embodies. The journey of transforming the volunteer activity into a thriving club was not without challenges, but the resilience and vision instilled in me by the US Japan Council and Mr. Watanabe pushed me to persevere. Through this experience, I learned the true essence of leadership – not just as someone who guides and directs others, but as someone who empowers and supports them to reach their full potential.





Leona Iizuka
Brandeis University (Degree-Seeking)

I continued my studies at the College of Arts and Sciences, where I had plenty of opportunities to nurture my curiosity and advance my understanding of social sciences. Coming to college, I knew my major interests were in business and sociology, but I did not have a solid sense of what these studies were about, nor did I know what I wanted to major in. The liberal arts curriculum allowed me to take all the subjects I was interested in and helped me narrow my interests.

In February 2023, I had the opportunity to meet other Watanabe scholars in Los Angeles as a part of the scholarship program. Being my first trip, I wasn't sure what to expect, but the program turned out to be different than what I had initially anticipated. It provided me with ample time to reflect on my past experiences, and I felt highly valued by the Watanabe Scholarship team. Therefore, I felt comfortable sharing my experiences, academic endeavors, and future career goals with my peers, and other scholars seemed to be relaxed as I was. During this program, Mr. Watanabe emphasized the importance of sharing our goals, big or small, and taking action to achieve them. Initially, I thought my goals were too vague to share, but I realized that expressing them in words is crucial to receiving support and making progress.

I took the most of a liberal arts education at Brandies University, and I get academically excited when I find connections between my diverse experiences. For example, despite having no prior knowledge or skills, I was able to work as a research assistant in a psychology lab and was treated like a professional. Through this opportunity, I made a valuable connection and received a referral from my supervisor. This led to an interview with my supervisor's friend from Harvard University, where I eventually received an offer to work as a UX/UI designer and consultant at a startup. I always knew that I wanted to work at a startup and was encouraged by Mr. Watanabe's words to consult my psychology mentor for a summer internship in the UX/UI field.

After completing two years of my undergraduate at Brandeis University, I decided to pursue further studies at a different institution. Over the course of two years, I experimented with different subjects and realized that expertise in economics is crucial to understand the impact of businesses on people's lives and the economy as a whole. As a result, I changed my major to Economics and will be continuing my education at Vanderbilt University this fall. I am working at a Harvard Business School-based startup this summer, focusing on social travel. I believe my past experiences will benefit me in this job and help me achieve my goal of starting my own business and contributing to entrepreneurship development and the economic bond between Japan and the US. I'm excited to meet the new cohort of Watanabe Scholars this academic year and work together to bridge Japan and the US.





Namuka Ishii
University of Chicago (Degree-Seeking)

I studied public policy at the University of Chicago and the Harris School of Public Policy from September 2022. The University of Chicago has three semesters. I took Statistics, Microeconomics, and Political Philosophy classes, which all freshmen were required to register for in the fall and winter semesters. In the statistics class, I learned the basics of data analysis and statistical methods. In public policy, data analysis is essential for evaluating the effects and impacts of policies. In this class, I learned how to use statistical methods and tools through exercises and case studies using actual data. I used the statistical data to study the impact of small class sizes on student performance. In my microeconomics class, I studied market trends and individual behavior. Public policy requires the application of economic principles to address issues such as market failure and inequality. In this class, I delved deeply into supply and demand, market equilibrium, externalities, and public goods, and developed skills in applying economic thinking to policy making.

I started the fall semester in September and found myself attending an event for Watanabe scholars in LA in February. I found this event to be a very meaningful time for me as a Watanabe scholar. Not only did I learn about what other scholars were learning, but I was able to build a community with Japanese Americans. The most interesting parts of the event for me were the lectures by UCLA professors and the tour of the Japanese American National Museum. This tour was a very important experience for me as it provided a rare opportunity to gain insight into Japanese American history and culture. The tour also gave me the opportunity to learn about the difficult historical events and human rights violations that Japanese Americans faced. I was particularly struck by the exhibits on the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. These exhibits reminded me of the importance of fairness and respect for human rights, while at the same time demonstrating the strength and spirit of resistance of the Japanese American community. I also learned about the formation of Japanese American identity and community. Through their stories and experiences, I was inspired to reflect on my own identity. This tour not only gave me an understanding of Japanese American history and culture, but also made me think deeply about the importance of social justice and human rights. Through this valuable experience, I learned the importance of playing a role in promoting empathy and understanding with others so that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated.

I hope to be a bridge between the two countries, and I look forward to the new semester starting this September with the dream of one day becoming that bridge myself.





Sakura Ishizaki

Grinnell College (Degree-Seeking)

First, I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to everyone working for the Watanabe Scholarship for supporting my undergraduate studies at Grinnell College since 2020. Especially during the difficult time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both the financial and mental support from the scholarship meant a lot to me and helped me thrive at Grinnell College. With support from the scholarship, I was able to graduate from Grinnell College on May 22, 2023 as a Biological Chemistry and Anthropology double major. I am extremely excited to share that I graduated as the “首席” (my college called it the “Archibald Prize”) and received multiple awards upon graduation:

I was able to focus on my academics and have the time to challenge myself through medical anthropology research experiences and internships that are of my interest, and not worry about working long hours to help pay the tuition. Reflecting overall on my time at Grinnell, I must admit that my stress levels were extremely high every day. Even during these difficult times, I found myself feeling grateful for the educational opportunities I was receiving at Grinnell. I enjoyed the challenges I was facing as I could feel myself gaining the ability to think more deeply, critically, and from multiple perspectives. At Grinnell, I have changed and become a life-long challenger. My final year at Grinnell was one of the toughest yet most rewarding, fruitful times I have ever experienced in my life. My research is entitled “ICU Patient Admission and Mechanical Ventilator Decision-Making Processes in a Japanese ICU during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” Given the sensitive findings of my research regarding some unethical medical decisions the hospital managers made, I had to undergo a five-month-long negotiation with the managers to receive approval to submit my findings to an academic journal. After the long negotiation, a lot of details were cut from my original article, but we were able to reach an agreement. I received first place for the Student Online Poster Prize at the SfAA’s conference, and the fact that the prize brought joy to everyone who supported my research fulfilled my heart. I am looking forward to delivering great news to everyone at the Watanabe Scholarship who have supported my journey at Grinnell College!





Jonathan Jackson
Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University (Degree-Seeking)

Being the only American in my department can at times feel unique and lonely, however the close relationships I have made with the people I study with and also live around have amplified the joys of staying in Japan. Being here and studying at Kobe University, to me it shows a line of hard work and progress that began in the late 1990s in a school in the north Georgia mountains. When I put into perspective of where I began then and where I am now, it really is something that

I am amazed by, proud of, and at times can't hardly believe.

The sense of support I have been given from the Watanabe team and the feeling of community from other scholars I have met has been extremely special to me and something that is important to cherish. It has been a rare opportunity to be a part of this term's scholarship recipients and it is something I will be grateful for even once I have graduated and moved on into my working life. Just this summer I have finalized my own 90-page master's thesis on Japanese politics and security policy, and with that I am set to graduate this coming September 2023. In a historical sense, visiting the city of Hiroshima was very grounding for me, as the location of the 1st atomic bombing, this is a city which I have seen and read a lot about during my education. So, for me, seeing this location in person is a powerful experience. For me, as many of my studies have revolved around the subject of political science and international relations, especially in regard to US-East Asian relations, finishing this graduate degree in Japan now gives me a significant accomplishment that not only has broadened my perspectives, but I feel will also help me in my future career plans.

Not only the conference but other programs given by the Watanabe team were also very impactful such as the 3-part virtual program we all got to attend to. This program really helped give new perspectives on the lived experiences of the past, as well as help me learn more about the historical and contemporary lives of Japanese Americans and their accomplishments as well as challenges they have faced in their communities. Being a Watanabe scholar has meant so much more to me than just studying in Japan. I have been given support and community, I have been given new experiences, and I have been able to accomplish my own personal and academic goal all while apart of this program.





Kiwa Kadekaru
Lane Community College (Degree-Seeking)

Looking back over the past two years, I have had many opportunities to get to learn about other cultures; volunteering at POWWOW, a festival unique to the First Nation, and participating in the international events held by the school's International Program. I participated in the POWWOW, a traditional First Nations festival, as a volunteer and could hear directly from First Nations people and see their costumes and dances, which was a very valuable experience. At the end of the first year, I got involved in a musical show at school called "Songs for a New World" which became a turning point for me. I was nervous about performing in English for the first time, but the experience made me realize that musicals were something I would love to pursue in my life. I enjoyed it so much that I started taking more music and acting classes. I could learn a lot of things I had wanted to study in the States, and I had the opportunity to participate in various projects, which helped me grow a lot. In particular, when I performed in front of people, I was afraid of their reactions, but everyone was very tolerant and accepting, and many people enjoyed my performance and cheered me on, which gave me confidence. Also, some friends asked me to help with art and music projects, and I assisted with photography, singing, and instruments. Thanks to these experiences, I was able to challenge myself with courage and get over the fear. I also made my goals even clearer and what I need to do to achieve them.

Furthermore, I got some new insights by interacting with people from various cultures and backgrounds. As I communicated in English with them, I improved not only my English skills but also my communication skills. I learned the importance of expressing my opinions and the diversity of ways to communicate and discuss. I will cherish the beliefs that I built based on the knowledge and experiences I gained during my study abroad period.

Being a Watanabe Scholar brought a sense of responsibility to me. When I met other scholars at the LA Leadership Weekend, I was inspired by their diligence and unwavering dedication to their studies, and I was thrilled to be a part of it. My current goal is to study musicals more in-depth in NY. I will be preparing well this year so that I can start school in New York next fall semester. I was strongly impressed by Mr. Watanabe's lecture at the Leadership Weekend where he talked about the steps to make your goals come true. My ultimate goal is to perform as an original cast member in a new musical show on Broadway. I am strongly attracted to the world of theater, where many people are involved in creating a production. It would be my greatest happiness to be a part of that as a performer. I need experience and skills for this, so my immediate goal is to go to NY for school and audition.





Kanon Kii
University of West Alabama (Exchange)

There are two main things I have learned in the nearly year I spent at the University of West Alabama. The first thing is that "the world is wider than I thought" The days I spent in the tiny, vast land of Livingston in Alabama made me think about this over and over again. It is surprisingly difficult to be alone in Tokyo. However, living in Livingston is the easiest way to be in solitude. "No matter what I do, where I go, I am on my own. That's why I have to protect myself." I have kept the feelings I had at that moment in my heart so that I will never forget it. I am sure that I will remember it again in the days to come when I am lost, troubled, or in pain in my life. "Being oneself, being original" was thoroughly encouraged. It is not about which culture is better or worse, Japan or the U.S., but simply the fact that they are "different" opened up a new world to me. I realized that there is no need to aim to be normal because "normal" is gone away just by crossing the ocean, and I'm happy that I could experience the preciousness of being me in Alabama.

I was a student of the Faculty of Arts, so I mainly took arts-related courses at UWA, but most of the classes were project based and even in classes that had examinations, many of them were open-book exams which is far from the so-called "exam" in Japan. In all classes, the absolute emphasis was not on "whether or not you have memorized the knowledge completely," but on "how and what you have learned." I told my professor the style of having a test was so different from Japan, and she said "As long as you are trying to learn something, it doesn't matter how you do it." That was very new to me, and I enjoyed it. As long as we are working toward the goal, originality is allowed in the process. As a student who is taking classes teaching-training courses, I feel that it was a wonderful experience to realize the way to bring out the best in students.

The year I spent studying at UWA has been incredibly challenging and shocking. Every day made me so sure that there is still so much more I don't know that I can't even imagine. But that is the reason I continue learning today and tomorrow till the end. I am very much grateful for the support of the Watanabe Scholarship from the bottom of my heart for giving me this opportunity. I will move on to the master's course in Japan and hopefully be back in the United States in the future to build up the beautiful bridge between Japan and the United States, with the mates I have met through the Watanabe Scholarship.





Mone Kinjo
Dartmouth College (Exchange)

The classes at Dartmouth were incredibly fulfilling for me. In particular, the political science courses provided numerous opportunities for engaging in discussions on a wide range of topics such as American diplomacy, immigration policies, the role of international organizations, and AI. I also had the opportunity to learn not only from professors but also from my fellow students' opinions and perspectives. The high proportion of class discussions allowed us to express our own views and gain deeper insights through meaningful debates. Studying at an institution in a different country provided me with a valuable international perspective. The emphasis on students' autonomy and initiative in the American education system encouraged me to deepen my own learning independently. As a result, I was able to enhance my self-management skills and develop an independent thought process. Overall, the classes at Dartmouth had profound significance in my life. The interactive learning through discussions, the stimulating interactions with exceptional friends, and the experience of overcoming challenging assignments not only expanded my knowledge and skills but also broadened my perspectives and fostered personal growth.

The Leadership weekend in LA was a pivotal moment for me, and I consider it to be of great importance. As a recipient of the scholarship, I had the opportunity to interact with fellow scholars who came from diverse backgrounds in terms of age and academic disciplines. Furthermore, thanks to the introduction by the US-Japan Council, I was able to connect with past scholarship recipients. This opportunity allowed me to forge meaningful connections with individuals who I believe will be invaluable assets in the future. The interactions and encounters I had during this time have enriched my life and expanded my network.

My life has undergone significant changes through the experience of studying abroad. Interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, shaped by different cultures and languages, increased my opportunities to engage with others who had unique perspectives. This expanded my worldview and taught me the importance of respecting others' viewpoints and opinions. Moreover, my interest in working overseas grew significantly during my study abroad period, leading me to pursue a career in the field of finance in Singapore after graduation.





Miho Kurashima
University of North Carolina Wilmington (Degree-Seeking)

I could finish the Bachelor of Arts program at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and obtain practical skills for filmmaking as well as a vast network of connections, academically and professionally. As part of the filmmaking classwork, I was assigned as a producer and could work in big team environments, learning how to manage and communicate with people who have different cultures and backgrounds to make the film successful. Organizing film locations and production procedures amidst tight schedules and multiple meetings with team members revealed my strengths and weaknesses as a team player. I learned how to contribute to the team project using my strengths and how I can support the team members when they face challenging situations in their positions. Because each member also has strengths and weaknesses, we all assisted each other and strived hard to make the film the best project.

Since I decided to study abroad in the United States to learn filmmaking when I was 14 years old, I faced many challenges in pursuing my dream. However, having strong support from the Watanabe Scholarship gave me the confidence to pursue my dream, and meeting Mr. Watanabe, young professionals, and the other Watanabe Scholars in person in Los Angeles at the Watanabe Scholars Leadership Weekend and connecting with many people through the U.S.-Japan Council, I realized I am not alone and there are always possibilities if I never give up and never stop looking for opportunities. The opportunities I learned about the history of Japanese Americans taught me the importance of passing on history, staying connected, and working together to make the world a better place. I was especially moved by the lecture from Mr. Maki Michell at the Go for Broke National Education Center because I noticed there are many stories we must pass on to future generations to make a better society. Japanese Americans' powerful and respectful life stories made me think of how I can contribute to the stronger U.S.- Japan relationship and certainly empowered me to keep moving forward to become a forefront media creator. As my mission as a filmmaker, I would like to produce a film about Japanese Americans to inform people of their histories, memories, and experiences and encourage the stability and trusting relationship between U.S. and Japan by using media technologies.





Brad Leathers
Kansai Gaidai University (Exchange)

The chance to study abroad study has meant giving me the chance to put into practice the things that I have learned through the everyday interactions I have had with not only Japanese students, and professors, but also with so many local people at bars, restaurants, and tourist attractions. One class I took in the Spring semester was Modern Japanese History taught in Japanese. We read many excerpts from historical primary sources, such as diaries, journals, and autobiographies, all in Japanese. Through this class, I was able to learn a lot about not only history but also see historical events through the eyes of people at those times, as well as the language they used, since older Japanese documents are written using a quite different writing style and words. This was immensely beneficial for my understanding of Japanese language and history. Personally, this experience has given me the chance to meet so many new friends from not only all over Japan but also all over the world. Having the opportunity to learn about a wide range of cultures and languages has always been one of my goals in my life and the friendships I created here are invaluable to me. At the beginning of this study abroad experience, I had trouble meeting new people and making friends.

It wasn't until after my second semester started when I was a bit more used to speaking Japanese and I had slowly become more capable of approaching people on campus to speak that I was finally able to make more friends. I finally found a group of like-minded international friends who were all very talented as second (and third) language Japanese learners. Being surrounded by people who shared my goals and values made my semester much better.

As far as longer-term goals, once I am able to return to Japan and work a bit, I would love to be able to attend graduate school in Japan once I improve my Japanese skills past an N1 level. My study abroad experience has truly shown me that I am capable of using my language skills in real-world and academic applications. My time here has inspired me to see how far I can take my language skills and what I can make of them in my career.





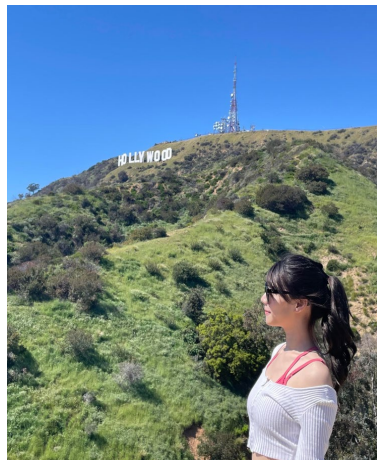
Sae Morozumi

University of California, Los Angeles (Degree-Seeking)

This year was my first year of studying at UCLA, the school which was always my dream school. I started dreaming about studying at UCLA when I was 15 years old, and this was necessary for me to pursue my dream to work as a person with a diverse and global perspective.

While studying abroad at UCLA, I had a few times to attend job fairs for Japanese international students. I communicated with some of the companies and realized that I might want to go back to Japan after graduating university. I came up with this not because I wanted to leave the United States but because I thought I could commit my knowledge and skills I gained in the United States to the Japanese future and economics.

One thing that I was worried about studying at a 2 university was taking lectures in a larger class. I did not have confidence that I would be able to follow up everything that professors say in the lectures; however the teaching assistants are always there to help me understand the important materials from the lectures. In my personal opinion, international students could easily get overwhelmed by the studying materials at school. The more academic school they attend, the more passion they need to manage their social life and the study at school. However, if the student seeks help, there are numerous options they can get help from. When I decided to apply for the Watanabe Scholarship, I was uncertain about my chances of success due to my previous experiences studying abroad. I worried that these experiences might be viewed as a disadvantage, as the scholarship aimed to support students who have not had many opportunities to travel or study overseas. However, I soon realized that my diverse experiences were an asset rather than a hindrance. The Watanabe Scholarship not only provides financial support but also focuses on leadership development and community engagement. It seeks students who have the potential to become future leaders and change-makers in their respective fields. This aspect of the scholarship gave me hope, as I strongly believed that my experiences abroad had transformed me into a more open-minded, adaptable, and culturally aware individual.





Yurika Nakagawa
Smith College (Degree-Seeking)

Unlike my first year spent seeking comfort in an unfamiliar place, I spent my sophomore year at Smith College diving into whatever healthy uncomfortableness my curiosity had led to. As a result, not only has my next steps as a student become clear, valuable skills and friends were discovered. I study computer science and philosophy as I am interested in exploring the intersection of the two, namely the ethical handling of big data and the ethics of AI. I worked on a big project and developed a web application with my team. Since the project was to recreate a development environment as in an actual company setting, we had to figure out the goal ourselves, referring back and forth between incomplete pre-written codes and documentation. The project was an intense but worthwhile experience. It taught me what it takes to be a competent software engineer and how non-coding skills, such as metacognition and teamwork, too are critical to successful development. After completing this course, fascinated by the collaborative engineering process, I decided to join a lab to be a part of a larger-scale software development next semester. The philosophy course covered existing ethical concerns regarding politics, the environment, technological advancements, and more. While we never reached a unanimous conclusion, the endless exchange of thoughts with my classmates offered me opportunities to reexamine issues in a different light. Analyzing social issues at Smith College, where feminism is prominent, was uniquely valuable as students often question the well-accepted social norms that I have never thought to examine, revealing my unconscious bias. Tackling my own bias is the lifetime goal that led me here.

An intro drawing class is one of the courses I took to surround myself with an unfamiliar crowd. While I initially hesitated to register for the course for lacking artistic experience, it turned out to be one of the best decisions I made at Smith. By the end of the semester, I not only developed my aesthetic sense and drawing skills but became close with artistic people who excel in self-expression. What is more, the knowledge of identifying light sources and turning a 3D scene into a 2D image I learned in this art course later intertwined with the topics discussed in my computer graphics course. Outside the classroom, I am heavily involved in my house community as a House Community Advisor (HCA). My role as an HCA is to ensure they are welcomed by and benefit from their house community. "Prioritize what you can only do at that given moment." This is something I always keep in mind to enrich my college life.

Interacting with other Watanabe Scholars on the Leadership Weekend was empowering. As I did not know any Japanese student who goes to school in the U.S., I was genuinely glad to have the opportunity to share and relate to some study abroad experience from a Japanese perspective. Despite the difference in our academic interests, conversations with peer scholars and U.S.-Japan Council members who decided to see the world outside their home country to pursue their dreams inspired me to continue following mine.





Ayano Nakamura
Bates College (Degree-Seeking)

Looking back at my four years at Bates, I have matured significantly. Some goals stay the same, but my approach to my dreams have also changed. I have found my true passion, purpose, and fostered a greater understanding of the world and about myself. To achieve this goal, in my first year, I tried out various subjects and topics. I tried studies such as Environmental Studies, International Politics, Economics, Chinese, and Sociology. Because I had a dream to become a diplomat, I knew I needed to study many fields, but mainly Politics. However, I caught myself being intrigued in the study of Sociology and Chinese the most, and ended up declaring them as my fields of study. People often told me, “Once you enter college, you will realize what you like, and you will most likely change your mind, and that is OK.” I guess this was true for my case too. In Sociology, I loved to understand societal norms and to try to come up with theories and ideas on why these norms exist. On the other hand, learning Chinese allowed me to explore their culture, especially their culinary culture as my professor often hosted Chinese dinners. By the end of my first year, I found myself loving things I never knew existed prior to college. The second year was devastating for all of us, with COVID-19 full in bloom, we all had to change our lifestyle drastically. Thankfully, my school allowed students to be back on campus, but I remember there were long periods of lockdowns and intense self-reflection. During this time, I had the privilege and the time to ask myself, “What makes me truly happy?” and in my mind, I would always go back to the memory of my Chinese class, especially the dinners we had. I reminisced about the fun conversations and the feeling of being together and sharing delicious meals. It was eye-opening to learn about food and its own unique history and relationship with their people. I recognized the undeniable power of food in creating strong relationships between people, even with different cultures, backgrounds, or values. In my final year at Bates College, I fully understood the positive impact food has had on my personal growth and relationships with others. I dream to create food and beverage brands that deeply move both Japanese and American consumers. But my dream goes beyond products—I envision creating sensational US-Japan culinary exchange events that attract thousands of people, united by the universal language, food. The bond between Japan and the United States has greatly influenced my life, as it sparked curiosity among Americans whenever I moved to the States and sparked similar interest among Japanese when I returned. I always had a huge appreciation and respect toward the pioneers who influenced my life in such great ways. Naturally I developed my own desire to become the bridge between the two countries. Throughout the four years, my goals have never changed, but the approach to achieving my goal has altered. Now, I can confidently say what my purpose in life is; to strengthen the US-Japan relationship through the power of food.





Hitomi Nishioka
Georgia State University (Exchange)

Studying abroad in Atlanta has given me the time to feel perplexed about who I am and look for and identify my identity and who I want to be. Because of the U.S. background and social environment, I became lost and had a difficult time figuring out my life's definition and how to describe myself. The biggest turning point to think back on my identity was the discussions in the classes. I had taken classes on various topics, such as sociology, sexuality, ethics, and maternal health, and despite these kinds of different subjects, many class discussions ended up becoming heated regarding how differently black and white people have been treated in society. I think the history of black discrimination is deeply rooted in people's minds, especially in the southern part of the U.S., where I studied. However, at the same time, these discussions made me think of "where I am." I am neither a black person nor a white person. Indeed, some of these discussions focused on "Asians" partly because I brought up the category of "Asian" to the table.

I remembered one of the class activities where my professor asked us to write down the words "I am" ten times and then add something after that. In my case, I wrote down "I am Japanese," "I am a woman," "I am 21" and so on. Some classmates added adjectives to describe their own abilities or characteristics, such as "I am confident." I realized that I had adjectives only to describe what I belong to rather than who I am not only because I did not have the confidence to express myself with such positive words but also because I had never thought about who I was in Japan. From these experiences, I found that the reason why I felt like I was losing my identity was all of my identity was composed of what category I was classified as, such as Japanese, a woman, and non-religious. It was considerably annoying to me that I had no confidence and way to express myself with adjectives to describe my abilities and characteristics. I sought as many opportunities as possible regarding my passion, which is to ensure children's authority, especially in hospital settings, and develop children's hospices in Japan. I did volunteer work at the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and Give Kids the World. Volunteering during spring break at Give Kids the World, an amusement park for terminally ill children, was life-changing for me.

I was not skillful in English, so it was hard for me to speak out in classes and have good conversations with people. To overcome this, I first started by sharing my opinions in small-sized classes and within team activities. By repeating trial and error, both my professors and teammates came to respect my Japanese perspectives. I gained more confidence to speak out and became aware of the fact that everyone could appreciate my sincere opinions regardless of my English skills, winning president's lists and a leadership award. These experiences created my confidence, like the pieces of a puzzle, and got to know myself. After my life-changing year in the U.S., I am very proud of my decision and my courage to challenge studying abroad. Also, being a Watanabe scholar and a part of the U.S.-Japan Council community made this precious experience more meaningful.





Tamane Takehara
Temple University Japan (Exchange)

If I were to describe the Watanabe Scholarship in one word it would be “life-changing”. If it were not for the Watanabe Scholarship, I would not be able to pursue and discover my true passions in Contemporary Japanese Art, make meaningful connections with the current and future generations of international leaders, and become immersed in my home country’s current culture, society, and politics. During my attendance at Temple University Japan which was possible with the support of the Watanabe Foundation, I have been able to participate in multiple extracurricular activities which have allowed me more personal, academic, and professional insight into my future goals.

Though I think I have grown immensely within the academic and professional sector – I have also grown personally as well. Being more connected in my culture and becoming more immersed in those who have similar experiences and interests as I have has immensely improved my mental health, and I have been able to better balance my personal interests as an artist, and my professional interests in art history. I was not afforded much of this mental stability before being accepted by the Watanabe Scholarship, as I often felt disconnected from my peers and models, and had a hard time balancing work-life spheres because I did not have adequate funding for housing, tuition, and exploring extracurricular opportunities. With this scholarship, I felt like I had released the tension I was clenching inside my heart, finally able to breathe. For the first time in my adulthood, I was able to concentrate on my happiness, my needs, and my passions, while being provided the incredible bonus of forming lasting relationships and experiences along the way.

The program overall was wonderful and awe-inspiring– with the virtual program preparing us for the Annual Conference and a meeting with Mr. Watanabe. The program is supported by incredibly talented and ambitious staff members such as Ms. Grace Kim and Ms. Kana Takagi, and of course the inspiring Mr. Toshizo (Tom) Watanabe, and I am eternally grateful to their efforts in skillfully navigating the COVID era world, and shaping our life-changing experiences in Japan. I am also glad to say I have made some friends along the way. For future scholars and students who wish to study abroad, I also urge them to allow themselves to find their own professional and personal passions. I also feel as if a semester was not enough, and I had wished I had looked into study abroad programs earlier into my academic career, as it changed the trajectory of my life.



Gabriella Tamayo
Kansai Gaidai University (Exchange)

After studying abroad in Japan for the Fall 2022 semester, I was able to truly get out of my comfort zone for the first time by traveling internationally. Personally, I have always wanted to travel, so this was something that I have been looking forward to since high school. I knew that once starting college, studying abroad through my school would be the most financially feasible and best way to travel internationally.

Since my freshman year of college, I started planning on what I would need to do and the general process of studying abroad. And with the incredibly generous help from the US-Japan Council Watanabe scholarship, I was able to embark on this new chapter in my life, comfortably. In Japan, the language barrier is very evident but not impossible to overcome. The more I learned in Japanese class, the easier it became to communicate, in the small ways I could, and read signs and such. But to get from point A to point B, there were many instances involving asking for help. I very quickly learned that I could not be shy and have to be assertive in most situations. Even at the level of going to a restaurant- typically one would wait for their server to check up on them to ask for anything whereas in Japan you must grab their attention and go out of your way to ask for help. And the help received is like none other I have ever experienced. Every Japanese person I have asked for help has gone above and beyond in order to help me and my friends. I can honestly spend the rest of this writing about how kind the people are and how willing they are to help, but it also bleeds into the idea of group orientation.

Before I knew it I had three, two, and one week left before I had to fly home. I tried to cram everything I did not get to do but still could not get to a lot of it. It was upsetting at first, but I want to look at it as a reason to go back with a plan of action. So I am looking forward to returning to Japan for some time and experiencing the things I did not have the time for with more ease than when I first arrived. I suggest that future scholars, while also focusing on their school work, carve time out and do things. Join a group of other international students and get out there. I joined another, more active, group later on in the semester and had the most fun on some wild adventures. I never thought I would go rafting on some Japanese rapids, but there I was! Overall, this experience feels like it has been my gateway to many more. I look forward to exploring more of the world and continuing to learn more about Japanese culture and language. I hope that this is just the beginning of many more adventures!



Zen Tamura
Brown University (Exchange)

My year abroad at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island has changed my perspective on future directions. I discovered that I like mathematics. Fall semester was a mix of successes and failures. I took Computational Molecular Biology, a statistics class, and a theoretical computer science class (Theory of Computation). On the one hand, I discovered that I liked the theoretical aspects of computer science, which came as a surprise. Theory of Computation was about mathematical models of computation, the limits of classical computation, and computational complexity theory. At first, it felt like a hard class. With my limited mathematical background, I found the homework assignments to be hard. I felt inadequate compared to my peers who seemed to be understanding everything. As the semester progressed, however, I started to realize that I liked the material. I couldn't wait for Theory of Computation every week. I loved working on the homework problems even though they took a while for me to work through. By the end of the semester, it was by far my favorite class. For spring semester, I decided to register for four mathematics classes (Linear Algebra with Theory, Introduction to Real Analysis, Graph Theory, and Abstract Algebra) and audit a philosophy class (Set Theory).

There was also great energy in all of my mathematics classes. All of my math professors seemed excited about the material they were teaching and there was always a dialogue between the professors and the students in my math classes. Without knowing anything about pure mathematics, I decided to take a leap of faith and register for four mathematics classes. I learned how to write clear and rigorous mathematical proofs. I learned the broad foundations of modern mathematics: analysis, algebra, and some topology. I found mathematics to be more about fascinating ideas than cold hard equations. My set theory class taught me that mathematics is very much a human enterprise. I learned that I enjoy thinking about mathematics. I was excited every day to go to class and to work on my homework. By the end of the semester, I was hooked. After taking computational biology and theoretical computer science classes during Fall Semester, it became clear to me that mathematics was the foundation of computer science and computational biology. I believed that a strong foundation in pure mathematics would be a much more powerful asset than simply knowing the latest algorithms used in computational biology. I am very grateful for this opportunity to study abroad. It would have been impossible to study computer science and mathematics in a structured, rigorous manner without this year. It is likely that I would have never discovered mathematics. I am not sure if I will pursue mathematics or if I will pursue the life sciences, but this year has provided a lot of clarity on my future directions.

I personally do not like taking risks, but this year, I decided I would take more risks. If I had been risk averse, I would have probably never discovered mathematics.





Aeris Thompson

International Christian University (Degree-Seeking)

For eight years I have dreamed of studying in Japan. I researched countless ways to make it to Japan and spent hours poring over YouTube videos living vicariously through exchange students living there. I was willing to give anything to make it there, but numerous attempts always fell through, whether it be for monetary reasons or issues with unfortunate timing. After years of study, I was accepted into International Christian University's undergraduate program as a regular student. This was far better than any summer abroad or even year abroad that I had originally envisioned. I was now going to be living in Japan for four years. Unfortunately, due to ICU being a Japanese university, a lot of the scholarships and financial aid I had prepared weren't available anymore as they were intended for American universities only. This is when I discovered the Watanabe Scholarship, which graciously funded my freshman year of university. I am currently working towards actualizing my dream of becoming a professional translator, so I wanted to lay the groundwork for that in my freshman year.

To continue, I will talk about my experience at the Watanabe Annual Conference, and how it caused a monumental shift in my study experience. During the conference, I attended the TOMODACHI Next Generation Summit, where I listened to a discussion by numerous speakers. I remember one speaker, in particular, introduced the work they do covering single mothers in Japan, and if I recall correctly, they said about 50% of single mothers are in poverty. This reminded me of my own mother, and how she has been working hard her entire life to support us, pursuing degree after degree so she can have a flexible skillset. That's why this in particular was impactful for me as I was raised by a single mother, and I admired the work the speaker was doing to improve the situation here in Japan. Of the numerous speakers I met, I was also very inspired by the Black American TOMODACHI alumni who lived and worked in Japan. I often don't see people who look like me or face similar struggles as me studying abroad in Asian countries, so it was extremely inspiring to know that I wasn't alone and that I could be successful here. I was also able to connect more with them after the panel, and hearing about their experiences motivated me.

Overall, this year, I have achieved many of my goals and developed new ones along the way as I faced challenges and dealt with grief throughout my year. I cannot thank Mr. Watanabe, and the U.S.-Japan Council enough for this opportunity, I'm extremely honored to be a Watanabe scholar. Thanks to this scholarship, I was able to give my mother the peace of mind that I would be able to study abroad.





Hideki Tomita
Stanford University (Degree-Seeking)

As I reflect on my international study abroad year as a Watanabe scholar, I am filled with gratitude for the transformative experiences, personal growth, and academic achievements that have shaped my time in the United States.

Throughout my study abroad experience, I have been immersed in a customizable curriculum, experienced a significant career impact, fostered meaningful connections within a vibrant community, and gained access to a vast network of accomplished alumni. Academically, studying abroad has provided me with a diverse and customizable curriculum, allowing me to tailor my education to align with my personal objectives and interests. The opportunity to explore accelerated core business courses and customize over 50% of my curriculum with electives has broadened my skill set and nurtured an entrepreneurial mindset.

The study abroad experience has had a profound impact on my career aspirations. Whether aiming to advance in my current career, launch a new venture, or explore a career change, the program has equipped me with the necessary resources, skills, and mindset to achieve my goals. The emphasis on transformative learning, skill development, and entrepreneurial thinking has empowered me to navigate dynamic and competitive professional landscapes. The exposure to a diverse network of accomplished professionals, both within the program and through the extensive alumni network, has provided me with valuable connections and mentorship opportunities to further enhance my career prospects.

As I conclude my international study abroad year as a Watanabe scholar, I am grateful for the incredible experiences, personal growth, and academic achievements that have shaped my journey. I carry with me a newfound confidence, a global perspective, and a lifelong commitment to continuous learning and growth. The study abroad experience has transformed me in ways beyond measure, and I am excited to embrace the next chapter of my academic and career journey with the knowledge and experiences gained through this remarkable opportunity.





Kobby Tran
Waseda University (Exchange)

The opportunity to be able to study abroad has presented me with a multitude of new thoughts and opportunities for what I would like to accomplish in the future, and a massive portion of these new thoughts being born was through the opportunity to attend the US Japan Council Annual Conference held in October 2022.

Being given the chance to study abroad has so many meanings attached to my particular life path, as it has allowed me the perspective to continue working with international business between America and Japan. On a personal level, prior to studying abroad, my thoughts on the future beyond university life were very bleak and nihilistic, often holding thoughts of fear and anxiety for what my future could potentially entail.

As magnificently overwhelming as the sights were of Tokyo, I had no idea what I was doing, so I had to rely on my shaky Japanese skills and ask the train station employees on how to get to my destination. My hardest time in Japan were the first few days where I had no connections with anyone and I was truly alone, but since those initial four days, I have not looked back. I have made so many friends throughout my time in Japan, and especially in the Watanabe Scholarship Program, since I still keep in contact with a few students after the scholarship event. After those isolated days, and after exchange in Japan, I have come to realize that mentally, I am strong, I can continue pursuing the life I want to live, but I need to have human connections to push me past that point of fear. I never could have expected what experiences I would have throughout my exchange in Japan, but even so, I would not alter any of the exchanges I have had throughout my year long adventure. To add on to this feeling of self-awakening, despite having so many thoughts about heritage betrayal pre-departure, it turns out that I had made many friends from Vietnam who were able to teach me aspects of their own culture, so not only did I learn so much about Japanese culture, I was able to enrich my knowledge of my own culture. Unfortunately, this chapter of my life is soon to come to a close, and as much as I would like to stay in Japan, I have mentally accepted that my life will continue back in America once this exchange is over. I am excited to see my loved one's once again, and I am excited to share so many details of my own adventures so that they are able to experience even a glimpse of my own experiences. Once I return home, I will continue with my education and continue to learn about Asian American culture with a newfound appreciation of Asian culture as a whole, while dreaming about the day I can return back to Japan once again.





Ryoga Umezawa
Minerva University (Degree-Seeking)

Studying at Minerva was an opportunity that reshaped my perspectives both personally and academically. As a student in brand management, I was able to delve deeply into the subject matter while being constantly surrounded by an international context.

The diverse student body and our collective journey through multiple global cities gave me a new perspective on how brand perception and management are influenced by cross-cultural nuances. During Manifest, my final graduation semester in San Francisco, I not only had the opportunity to share my Capstone project but also engaged in unique, experience-based learning via a series of design sprints and workshops.

Furthermore, we participated in a design sprint aimed at the reformation of Minerva's Integrated Learning Course, a significant aspect of Minerva's curriculum. This was an enriching opportunity for us to contribute to the future learning journey of Minerva students. Manifest also allowed for robust professional development. One such activity was a session on enhancing conversational skills in the context of networking and negotiating, essential for navigating the professional world. In addition, we had the chance to network with Minerva partners, an invaluable experience to connect and engage with professionals in various fields. Besides, I led a class session on my Capstone project, an endeavor that not only tested but solidified my understanding and capabilities in brand management. The experience was intense, insightful, and deeply rewarding. My Capstone project addressed the dearth of support for non-international high school students in Japan interested in studying abroad. I designed an online community where these students could find a safe and supportive environment during the exploratory phase of their applications. This project taught me invaluable lessons about the design thinking process, online community management, and the importance of continuous assessment. In parallel to my studies, I developed a personal social media brand to guide Japanese high school students interested in studying abroad. My channels became a significant resource for over 10,000 students and facilitated numerous partnerships and collaborations. The intersection of my academic and personal projects gave me a unique understanding of the power of social media in educational settings. Upon graduation, I am excited to expand on these projects and continue my entrepreneurial journey. By combining the insights from my Capstone project and the reach of my social media platforms, I aim to build a comprehensive platform for Japanese students considering studying abroad.

Being a Watanabe scholar meant access to world-class U.S. education, exposure to global cultures, and an unforgettable personal journey. It meant breaking barriers, overcoming challenges, and evolving into a global citizen capable of effecting change. It has been an honor to be a Watanabe Scholar at Minerva, and I am excited to leverage my learning to contribute positively to society.





Takuto Yoshida

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (Degree-Seeking)

Embarking on this transformative journey as a Watanabe Scholar, I found myself amidst a vibrant academic milieu, pushing my boundaries and honing my professional capabilities. A pivotal aspect of this journey was my enrollment in the Master of Public Health program at the esteemed Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Navigating through the rigorous curriculum, I acquired a plethora of skills, particularly in data analysis, which significantly augmented my analytical abilities. The journey was challenging, but rewarding, as I successfully earned my Master of Public Health degree. This accomplishment was not just an addition to my academic credentials but a testament to my determination and ability to overcome challenges. In the course of the program, I delved into a multitude of domains such as causal inference, clinical prediction modeling, machine learning, deep learning, and programming. Additionally, I developed expertise in longitudinal analysis and meta-analysis. This diverse range of skills has equipped me for more nuanced problem-solving and critical decision-making, preparing me for my future aspirations in a comprehensive manner. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant achievements was passing the USMLE Step3, marking the culmination of a decade-long journey towards obtaining a U.S. medical license. The pursuit was challenging, especially as I had to travel to the U.S. to take the final step. However, it instilled in me a new-found confidence, providing to myself and my family that I can indeed achieve my goals through hard work and perseverance.

This transformative journey has not only bolstered my academic capabilities but has also instilled in me a deeper sense of gratitude and resilience. The time spent learning data analysis amidst the demanding schedule of surgical practice was taxing, but it has significantly impacted my academic pursuits. It fostered a stronger commitment to evidence-based practices as a surgeon, while also opening avenues for my involvement in surgical AI research – a long-cherished dream. Preparation is paramount for making the most of your study abroad experience. For working adults intending to study abroad, I would suggest beginning the groundwork for your projects even before you leave. Time abroad is fleeting, and the best way to capitalize on it is by being well-prepared. Being a Watanabe scholar has been an experience like no other. Living outside of Japan for the first time, the journey was arduous. However, the hardships induced a sense of urgency that pushed me to challenge my boundaries. I am profoundly grateful for this life-altering experience that has been instrumental in molding me, professionally and personally.



Photo Collage



