

## My Junior Year Away at Ochanomizu University

Vassar college  
Summer Wu

It's been four months since I first arrived in Japan in April. I have had a great time studying away in Ochanomizu university.

I attended both the academic classes taught in Japanese and the Japanese language classes. Most of the academic classes I took were related to Asian Studies, my major at my home college. My favorite class is comparative social theories taught by Professor Minesaki. The class discusses about Muslim culture in the contexts of Egyptian and Japanese societies from a cultural anthropological perspective. From the gender and religion related issues, I learned to take a more nuanced approach to the subjects I encounter in daily lives, and started to try to examine the point of views we take for granted from a more diverse viewpoint. I also enjoyed the folk custom studies class by Professor Miyauchi. I learned about the methodology of fieldwork and the case studies of the Japanese folk lives (including studying the architectures, communities, historical events etc.). I acquired a more subtle understanding of the daily practices I observed as I stayed in Japan. I also took Ethics, modern history of Japan, and other classes that have challenging but fun contents and can only be taken in Japanese colleges. I took two Japanese language classes, taught by Professor Binderiya and Professor Wang. The classes were not only about Japanese languages, but also about the reality and problems in Japanese society. I also feel that my communication skills improved through the class discussions.



Besides the classes, I attended college orgs and events during my stay. I joined the folk dance club and danced in the school festival at the University of Tokyo. I got to know many friendly students from both Ochanomizu and University of Tokyo and had a lot of fun dancing with them. Also, I attended the Tandem program organized by Professor Nishisaka. It's a language learning program, and I got to pair with Momoka. We had conversation sessions in both English and Japanese every Wednesday, and we were also able to talk with a lot of other Japanese and international students about our experiences. I also participated in other events such as multicultural communication workshops and made friends that I could hang out with.

I also traveled during the four months. In Tokyo, I visited cafes and museums which mostly provide free tickets or discounts for college students. Near Tokyo, I had the opportunity to visit Hakone, Kamakura, and Yokohama. Outside Tokyo, I went as far as Kagoshima and Oita in Kyushu. I enjoyed visiting the Jinjas, being a part of the local festivals, having meals at random restaurants, and being stunned by the amazing views of oceans and mountains.

Japan is a very different place from the place I was born and from my college town. There were a lot of things I couldn't get used to. I am glad to find out that as long as you keep a routine even in an unfamiliar environment, it is only a matter of time before you start to see the pleasure in life again. Lastly, I would love to express my gratitude for all the people who helped me throughout the way. Many thanks to Ms. Ohno and Hagiwara sensei who helped me with visa and class registrations both before and after I came to Japan. I want to thank the teachers in Otowakan for the help with my daily dorm life. Lastly, a lot of thanks to my student tutor Tanaka, Momoka, and all the people who kindly talked to me helped in the student org and in classes.

