1. CET Osaka

a. Brendon Bouphachay, Fall 2017 Final Report

My name is Brendon Bouphachay and I studied at Osaka CET in the fall of 2017. If you want to get more confidence in your speaking, feel like a local, and make meaningful relations both inside and outside of the classroom, then Osaka is the way to go.

Academically it was very intensive and challenging. Every day classes would be 2-3 hours with additional elective courses (if that was something you wanted to do). The one place this program loses merit and where people have the most criticism is the workload. The homework itself is not difficult, it's just the amount given. On average 3-4 hours of homework would be assigned on top of studying for the day’s grammar quiz, or that week’s kanji quiz. On top of the homework, time is given to side projects and the final project. One of our side projects was to team up with local high schoolers to go interview people on some big general topic and then come together to make a presentation about it. The idea seems cool at first, but as time drags on for the project, motivation is lost, and frustration kicks in because of how time-consuming it is. The high-schoolers are somewhat disengaged, and the topics themselves are not that interesting. Then there is the final project that is a lot more interesting. You choose a topic of your choice and must conduct surveys and interviews to gather as much data as you can. You make a final speech about your findings and make a poster presentation to present your project to the public. So much time for this is spent insides and outside of class and it becomes mentally exhausting on top of all the other homework you have, plus time allocated to electives. The main issue with this is that it feels like you have very little time to actually explore Osaka and Japan itself. My time in Sun Academy in Tokyo was hard with a lot of work, but at least then I felt like I had some liberty and free time to explore the city during the day. At Osaka, I would go to my classes and either go back to my room to sleep because of how tired I felt or get started on the day’s homework. I felt I did not have real-time to explore until Friday and the weekends because the rest of the day was just work, work, work. I would actually advise in not taking any electives and just focusing on Japanese. I’m glad I took the electives I took because of special memories and friends that I made in those classes, but in retrospect, it would’ve saved me so much time and energy if I didn’t take them.

Aside from that, the staff and instructors are amazing and helpful. They’re always there when you need them. They are very approachable, and you can confide in them for whatever trouble you might be having. They become part of your family and they are very good at their jobs; whether it's advising the program or teaching the language.
The living situation was comfortable for me. I was fortunate to get a room for myself that had air conditioning, a heater, sink, T.V. and even its own wi-fi router. For some other shared houses, people had to have a roommate. In my shared house, everyone had their own room, and every student had an assigned Japanese buddy that lived right next to them. Understand this, you will have plenty of chances to hang out with your buddy and housemates, but it is not uncommon to go a few days or even a week without seeing your Japanese buddy or housemate. Many of the Japanese partners have their own apartment or have a house nearby and just stay at their own place. Many of them go to their classes, and go straight to their part-time jobs that are either really early in the morning, or really late at night. Expect to have fun with your Japanese buddies, but don’t expect a close intimate relationship where you see and talk to them every day (if you do, good for you). The fun thing about the houses is the freedom you have. Yes, there are rules set up by the landlord, but those rules never got in the way of having fun get-togethers and parties to blow off steam and bond on the weekends.

The reason I say that this program is where you get good at speaking is because there are so many opportunities to practice your Japanese outside of the classroom. When class is over you can have casual-easy going conversations with the sensei. If you go downstairs to the lobby for your break or lunch, you can run into you Japanese housemates or language partners that are hanging out there. If you’re eating lunch or dinner, you can go to the local restaurant down the street and talk to the owners and workers that run that shop because you see them almost every day and they love having your business and company. On the weekends you can go out to explore the city or other Kansai cities with your housemates or language partners to bond more. Maybe you’ll go back to the house to have a little party or go to an Izakaya or Karaoke to interact and have more fun. Part of the reason that makes talking to people so easy is that people from the Kansai area are generally friendlier and more out-going than any other people in Japan. They want to go out and have fun with you. They want to talk and get to know you, and you should not feel shy at all speaking to them no matter what your level of Japanese is. Use every chance you can to hang out with them, because I swear you’ll always cherish the memories and bonds you make with them.

Being in Osaka is very ideal in terms of sight-seeing, exploring, and doing tourist stuff. Osaka by itself is a city to marvel at, but from Osaka, you are only an hour away by train from key cities and attractions like Kyoto, Kobe, and Nara. The Japanese housemate and buddies are usually free on the weekend. From beer-festivals in Osaka to deer-feeding in Nara, from delicious beef in Kobe to temple-hopping in Kyoto, the possibilities and excursion plans are endless. Asking the teachers, staff, and Japanese students for recommendations is also highly advised. We would go out to a place as a group (like the aquarium) and end the day eating out together and going back to the house to have a little party. There was always something to look forward to on the weekend.

The bonds and relationships I made with the other students, teachers, housemates, and partners is the best thing I got from this trip. We all felt like family. Most of us didn’t want to
leave Japan because we got used to life here and were going to miss everyone. Leaving will be sad and tears will be shed, which is why you need to make the most out of spending time with the Japanese students there. These are people that I will never forget, and they have enriched my life in such a way that I can never repay them. I’ll always be grateful for the fun times they gave me.

b. Sam Gonzales, Summer 2018 Final Report

Academics:

After arrival, I was placed into the third-year Japanese class, class 313. Two factors helped me achieve my placement despite having only taken one year of Japanese at Yale. The first was character recognition. I have previously studied Chinese, therefore the amount of time I needed to spend on character practice was comparatively less, and my recognition was comparatively high. Second, I previewed the causative and passive grammar structures before the start of the program. Both of these aspects, kanji practice and new conjugations, are explained in more depth in the 243 class (year 2.5), which covers material that overlaps with the first half of the 313 class. For our textbook, we used Tobira: Gateway to Advanced Japanese, and covered the first ten chapters. We had class every day from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm, with an hour-long break around 12:30 for lunch. In terms of homework, there was mainly a combination of kanji, grammar, and conversation practice. Although there are media assignments built into the Tobira textbook, our class was not assigned them.

Daily classes in CET were similar to Japanese classes at Yale; there was daily in-class partner work, but less focus on grammar compared to Yale classes. As the semester progressed along with our speaking ability, we began to stage both prepared and impromptu in-class debates as well. Over the course of the semester there were two in-class trips to locations outside of Osaka. On the first trip we went to a candy-making shop where we made wagashi, Japanese sweets shaped like fruit or flowers. Among the other classes, some made candy as well, while others made crafts. For our second trip, our class was allowed to vote between visiting a no playhouse or Himeji Castle. We chose to visit Himeji Castle, which turned out to be a popular choice because the majority of the other classes also visited the castle throughout the day. After both trips, we were required to write an essay connecting our experience on the trip to the material in the textbook. Our tests constituted three unit exams and a final exam. The tests focused heavily on written model conversations and grammar patterns, with slightly less emphasis on kanji learning or listening comprehension.

Outside of Class:

CET arranges off-campus living spaces for all students. These apartments are all either within walking distance of school, or a single stop away on the Hankyu line. I lived in the latter,
a share house five minutes away from the train station. My accommodations were generally comfortable. Everyone in my apartment had a single room with a kitchen area and a desk or table to do homework on. Each apartment is unique, however, and many other locations had shared rooms and common spaces. Housing is one aspect of the program that is a relative gamble. Roommates, one of the main draws of the program, are another.

One of the factors that will have the greatest impact on your potential to improve your Japanese ability is how much time you devote to speaking with the Japanese roommates. Most of the roommates are willing to spend time with you doing anything from helping you with homework to traveling on the weekends. Occasionally some roommates spend more time away from their partners, however, and it can be difficult to take advantage of this part of the program if this is the case. My own roommate tended to hang out with other students near the end of the program but was always available to help me when I needed it. Moreover, because another Japanese housemate tended to remain in the apartment with his partner, I was never unable to spend time talking with a native speaker.

Bonding over food is one of the best methods I have found for interacting with the roommates. Every apartment is equipped with a space to cook, and making food together, in addition to eating together at your favorite restaurants, is a great way to spend quality time with the Japanese roommates. During my time in Osaka, I introduced my roommate to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches while he introduced me to natto (fermented soy beans), both of which we continued to eat on our own throughout the semester.

CET organizes several events outside class in addition to the trips made in class. These included a day trip to Awaji island for sightseeing and a trip to Kyoto. Beyond this, the program also organized a Japanese dance class that met weekly after class in preparation for a final recital at the closing ceremony. Finally, there are several informal get-togethers organized by the CET housemates that have become traditional CET events. For example, a trip to the beach, a BBQ in the countryside and a farewell party were all organized by CET housemates for participants in the program.

The language pledge is one of the main features of the CET program and it applies at all times throughout the semester, not only in class and on campus. While speaking English with your roommates should not be much of a temptation, it is important to interact with other students who are serious about maintaining the language pledge. Although this may limit your ability to make new friends and express your thoughts and feelings at first, it will greatly help your Japanese in the long run to struggle with the language pledge rather than give in and speak English with other students.

Life in Osaka:

Osaka has the same issues the afflict any large city, but generally speaking living in Osaka was a pleasant experience. Public transportation is dominated by the railroads; on the trains you can travel to downtown Osaka or Kyoto in under an hour. I spent several weekends in
Kyoto and was able to not only visit historical sites such as Kiyomizu-dera Temple (清水寺) but also experience the Gion Festival (祇園祭) as a day trip. While transportation within and from Osaka is convenient, the cost of living in Osaka was one of its downsides. Cheap restaurants are difficult to find in the areas around student housing and campus. To save money, I made my own meals when possible and occasionally ate prepared meals at the convenience stores. For anyone looking to save money, the convenience stores, particularly the 100-yen stores, carry most of the items you need to get set up in Osaka at a fraction of the cost you would pay elsewhere. One piece of advice I have is to always scour the 100-yen stores before buying any daily-use item anywhere else when you are first buying anything when you are settling into your new life in Japan.

One thing most people hear about Osaka when considering the program is that it is extremely hot. With the heatwave Japan endured over the summer, the temperature in Osaka hovered just under 100 degrees for the last three weeks of the program. In addition to this, heavy rains delayed trains around the start of the program. Preceding all of this, a 6.0 earthquake rocked Osaka during the second week. I say this not to dissuade anyone from choosing Osaka, however, the heat was bearable within the air-conditioning provided in every room, and floods and earthquakes are unpredictable and uncontrollable throughout Japan.

Overall, anyone who is self-disciplined enough to keep up with the consistent stream of coursework and wants to spend a semester in a convenient location on a program that allows the freedom of independent living and the opportunity to interact with other American and Japanese students should seriously consider CET Osaka.

c. Matt Norris, Fall 2018 Interim Report

**tl;dr (what’s different from other semester programs):**

The efficacy of the CET program is deeply tied to the roomshare program with Osaka Gakuin University students, which is run quite well. Most of the participating roommates are very engaged with the program and always wish to spend time chatting, exploring, helping with homework, and partying (optional). Academic experiences varied by level, but most coursework did a good job of supporting real-life interactional fluency. Heavy but manageable workload. There are many optional English- and Japanese-language elective courses with varying reviews—as Light students you aren’t required to take any for credit, so you can always audit if you’re unsure. Osaka and Kyoto are vibrant and friendly cities with so much to discover, and people are outgoing and talkative, so it’s easy to make friends. Housing is Japanese sharehouse style, with either singles or doubles, many with in-room kitchens. Generally, CET is a program with good vibes and a lot of cool programming (mid-semester overnight trip, program- & school-sponsored day trips, lots of food-related events, etc.). I would recommend for people whose focus is the social aspect of study abroad, seeing as CET is a small, intimate program
(average 15 foreign students in fall, 25 in spring) centered around an organized and effective roomshare. Those looking for a more authentic Japanese university experience should instead consider Nanzan.

**Housing/Roomshare Program:**

Housing is sharehouse style, which is common for Japanese university students. There is usually a kitchen/common space, shared bathrooms, and singles and/or doubles. It sounds similar to a dorm; the main differences are that these houses are not associated with the university (independently leased), are usually located further from campus than non-Japanese folks are used to, and have a more homey feel to them. All of the CET sharehouses are tucked away in quiet, residential neighborhoods. I’ve found that getting to know the specific personality of the neighborhood is a nice bonus of living further from the university.

Every foreign student in the program is paired with a Japanese “partner”/roommate, with whom you live and can study, eat, etc. As with any pairing, this relationship can be a gamble, but I’d say that most of the partners are committed to CET and really want to spend time with everyone. That being said, having a part-time job (almost every Japanese university student has one), intense studies, etc. can make it difficult to hang out with some partners. I get along very well with my partner, but we don’t spend too much time together as our schedules don’t align very well. There was also one case of a partner being asked to leave the program by staff because she was never home, and she was replaced by a new partner who luckily ended up being a great fit. Even if your partner is not around much, there are usually people hanging out in the student lounge in the International Center and in other sharehouses, so you can always find someone to talk to.

I have really enjoyed my sharehouse experience so far. I lived with 5 other students (altogether 3 Americans & 3 Japanese) in a single across the hall from my language partner (some other participants share a room with their partner). Though there is a communal kitchen, all of the rooms in the house also have a small “kitchen” (stove, fridge, sink) inside of them, so if you’re feeling antisocial, no biggie. Rooms are similar to average Yale dorm size. Cold inside in the winter due to no central heating; you can use the air conditioner, but the heat doesn’t last too long. That’s pretty average for Japanese homes; just bundle up in the provided blankets and a sweater and you’ll be fine.

The CET housing placement application (and, really, the entire process) is very good. It’s similar to the Yale housing survey, plus extra stuff about gender, sexuality, physical & mental health, diet, etc. There is a lot of space to explain what kind of housing situation you would feel most comfortable in / require to be happy and healthy. I personally identify as genderqueer and specified that I would prefer to live in gender-neutral housing (sharehouses in Japan are traditionally gender-segregated). Shortly after submitting the survey, the director of CET Japan reached out to me to schedule a video chat to talk over the survey and so she could give me an idea of what some housing possibilities could look like. This call was very reassuring and broke
down the bureaucratic wall that plagues academic programs like this one. In the end, the CET team worked with their local landlord to make two houses gender-neutral for the first time in program history, simply because I and two other students expressed that wish in our applications and talked it over with staff. Which leads me to...

**Staff:**

I have to say that the CET program staff are incredible, if that wasn’t already clear from the housing section above. In addition to tackling housing issues, the two main staff (1 Japanese, 1 American) know all of the Japanese roommates personally, having interviewed them and gotten to know them prior to our arrival. Being a multicultural team, they are quite adept at understanding cultural / communication issues from multiple perspectives. Their office door is always open, right on the way to the classrooms, so we would all frequently stop by to chat for a moment, update them with any current thoughts/issues, and grab a piece of candy. I’ve never had this type of relationship with the heads of a program, and the consistent building of the student-staff relationship made me feel more comfortable going to them for help when I needed it. I ended up seeking mental health counseling (which is fully covered by the Light Fellowship insurance!!!) during my time on program, and the head of program helped me research counselors and routinely checked in to see how things were going. She also accompanied me when I needed to go to the hospital and helped me understand the insurance reimbursement process.

Across the hall from the two main staff are the academic coordinators (2 Japanese folks) who help design curriculum and coordinate class placement. I also frequently spoke with them about study strategies and gave feedback on my class experience. They love to talk to students to see how to improve the academic experience at CET, and their door was also almost always open.

**Academic Experience:**

As with any program like this, student experience will vary greatly by language level, teachers, and number of students in the class. I feel very fortunate to have had a very positive (but intense) experience in the 400 level, the highest course offered by CET. This semester, there were only two of us in the class, and we had two teachers—one main teacher who focused on our textbook, みんなの日本語（中級II）, and one who focused on modules like onomatopoeia, idioms, and story writing. As there were only two students, this provided so much opportunity for speaking practice and to move past what the teachers felt we didn’t need extra practice on. I heard that in other levels with more students (though average class size was 3-4 students), this was not always possible.

In general, the workload at CET is fairly high. In the 400 class, we had some sort of reading, writing, kanji, and onomatopoeia/idiom assignment every night. For me, when I did complete it all, it took around 4 hours. Again, working speed is very subjective. Since I have
studied Chinese, kanji did not present as large an issue for me as it did my classmate, who is a native/heritage speaker of Japanese but had studied very little reading/writing; rather, I spent way more time on writing assignments. Our class generally had more abstract/long-term assignments than the lower levels, whose focus was on drilling grammar patterns to solidify daily usage.

Looking back on the class, I can see that the teachers put in so much work around the clock to create a curriculum that interested us and assignments that kept things fresh. They were both adept at keeping conversation flowing between me and my classmate, who are both fairly quiet. Perhaps the biggest thing I realized is the benefit of CET being such a small program—feedback is actually heard and implemented. Whether I talked over something with my teacher, the academic coordinators, or the main staff, they would all talk with each other and report back to me on what we should do next. There’s a lot of value placed upon lowering bureaucratic barriers at CET, and that really makes the program feel more cohesive and efficient.

In addition to the main Japanese courses, there is an opportunity to take elective courses offered in the International Department, some in English, some in Japanese, some which use both. The Light Fellowship doesn’t require you to take any for credit, so I’d definitely recommend if you do decide to check any out, go in planning to audit. I audited a class called Japanese Psychotherapies, taught by Sengoku-sensei. For the first 30 or so minutes of every class, we would do stretches, meditate, catch up on everyone’s day/week, and practice naikan, a psychotherapy in which you consider extensively about specific relationships in your life. The remainder of the class was either spent discussing what came up during our meditation/naikan, watching a movie, or reading aloud materials from Sengoku-sensei. It was a bit of a mess and would definitely not qualify as a class for credit at most universities, but I quite enjoyed it. Sengoku-sensei really cares a lot about making a homey and cohesive classroom environment, even if we’re not there to discuss many academic things. We ended up all becoming really close and hung out a lot outside of class. Totally check out the elective courses if any pique your interest, but make sure you discuss early with the professor if you’re interested in auditing, and don’t feel pressured to take any at all if you aren’t super enthusiastic after visiting.

Language Pledge:

CET has a very strict language pledge. On the fourth day of the program, after all the necessary English-language orientations, everyone (foreign students and Japanese roommates alike) must commit to speaking only Japanese until the closing ceremony (exceptions: ongoing orientation sessions, individual meetings with program staff, emergencies, calling home, whatever you do in your room with the door closed, etc.). During the fall semester, everyone was really committed to the language pledge. I only spoke English a handful of times with other program participants, and it was mostly to talk about memes. I’m glad that we had such an intense language pledge because it did a great job of creating a fully immersive environment in our housing, but of course it limits how much you can express yourself / get to know other program participants with whom you share English as a common language.
Interview Project:

Definitely an “it’s what you make of it” part of the program. Essentially, you must choose a topic of interest and interview people about it. There are two options—design an アンケート (written survey) and conduct a series of oral interviews with 20-30 classmates/teachers/strangers; or meet with one professor at the university continuously throughout the semester. All of the students from the fall semester selected the former, since OGU is a small university (so there just aren't professors in a lot of our areas of interest) and we all weren’t confident enough in our Japanese to try to understand specialized vocabulary from a professor. From the results of the surveys/interviews you must design a powerpoint for your class and a physical poster for a presentation event for the whole university. There are various check-ins during the semester, but you’re largely on your own, so some of us obviously waited to the last minute and it was a hot mess. You know the drill—just do it little by little when you’d rather be watching Youtube and you’ll make out fine.

Location:

Osaka Gakuin University is located in Suita City, within Osaka Prefecture just north of Osaka City. The school and sharehouses sit along the Hankyu Kyoto Line, providing easy access to both downtown Osaka (20 minutes and $2 to Umeda, 30 minutes and $3.80 to Nipponbashi) and Kyoto (40 minutes and $3.40 to Karasuma). It’s also easy to get to Kobe (40 mins, $3.40), Nara (1 hr 15 mins, $9), Himeji (1 hr 30 mins, $12.30), Wakayama (1 hr 50 mins, $11.50), and Koyasan (2 hrs 45 mins, $12.30). You can also take the Shinkansen or bus from either Osaka or Kyoto to Tokyo, Okayama, Hiroshima, Nagoya, etc. In short, the Kansai region is super well-connected, and there are lots of options to go cheap on transportation by taking slower trains and buses. Totally reach out to me if you have any questions regarding trip planning and traveling on the cheap!

The Kansai region (which comprises Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo, Wakayama, Nara, Mie, & Shiga prefectures) is known for friendly & outgoing people, and this definitely holds true in my experience. I have had so many positive interactions with strangers, and actually made friends with local cafe & restaurant owners, convenience store workers, and of course students at school. Kansai is generally hot and humid in the summer, with really comfy fall and spring. Especially compared with New Haven, winter is mild and there is very little / no snow. The region is surrounded by mountains with plenty of hiking & birdwatching opportunities, and opens to the sea in the west (there are beaches but I haven’t been). Osaka itself is a sprawling urban mass, but it doesn’t feel as constricting because transportation out of it is so simple and cheap.

Food:

Osaka is a foodie city, especially famous for street foods like okonomiyaki, takoyaki, and kushikatsu. People love to eat and love to drink, and you can easily find cheap good eats in most
neighborhoods. As it is the third largest city in Japan, many types of cuisine are available, but you may have to travel downtown to satisfy specific cravings. All housing is within walking distance of a few convenience stores (7/11, FamilyMart, Lawson), and just a bit further from a couple grocery stores. Kyoto is a more hip and youthful city, and is said to be a bit more “refined” than its brash neighbor Osaka. There seems to be a locally-owned cafe or a bakery on every corner. Also fancy cheese shops.

Eating out is actually very reasonable compared to most places in the U.S. For example, within walking distance of my sharehouse, I can eat omurice for $3.70, udon or donburi for $4.62, or ramen / sushi / other set meals at one of the convenience stores for $3 - 6. Since these prices are fairly comparable to buying ingredients to cook for yourself, many people rarely cooked in their houses except on special occasions. I did simply because I enjoy the process of cooking and because I wanted to learn how to use Japanese ingredients while they are readily available to me here (Light also allowed us to select a book from a shelf of Japan-related books before departure, and I chose a cookbook!).

Events/Trips:
CET tries hard to make the program socially cohesive, so there are fairly frequent food-related events (when everyone completed the mid-semester survey on time, we were rewarded with a pizza party; for thanksgiving, we had a potluck; for the end of the semester, we had a dinner banquet; other times we made chocolate fondue and nachos). These were nice opportunities to get to know program folks that you hadn’t really spent much time with before.

One overnight trip partway through the program, whose destination you get to vote for yourselves. No matter where you end up, you’ll stay in a nice ryokan or hotel with onsen or sentou. CET plans a bunch of activities during the day, and then people stay up late playing cards, truth or dare, and dRiInKInG *gasp*, etc. This fall we went to Tottori (the least populated prefecture in Japan woo) and saw the only sand dunes in Japan, made washi (Japanese traditional paper), went to a Conan (manga) themed town and a yokai (spirit monster) themed town. To be honest, I didn’t enjoy the planned activities that much—it kind of felt like they tried to scrape together what they could to fill in our time. I also don’t do super well when I can’t get away from large groups of people for extended periods of time. So yeah, not a bad time, but I do wish we had more opportunities to explore on our own.

***Bonus*** Part-time jobs:
A little-known fact about part-time jobs in Japan is that you can actually work up to 28 hours a week on a student visa! **You must receive a special permission before you apply for a job.** To do this, you can either 1) when entering Japan AT THE AIRPORT CUSTOMS DESK (RECOMMENDED) or 2) at your local city office. At the customs desk, you simply state that you wish to work part-time while a student, and the officer will give you a part-time work exception “application” (which essentially just requires your name & signature), which you fill
out at the desk. After giving it back to the officer, they will stamp the back of your residency card, which allows you to apply for jobs. BE VERY CAREFUL TO LET IT DRY BEFORE SLIPPING IT IN YOUR POCKET/WALLET. I got lucky and noticed that it was quite wet and stayed wet for around 20 minutes—I don’t know what’s in that ink, but it can easily smudge if you’re not careful.

Regarding jobs, CET is understandably discouraging of working a job. It will take time away from your studies. But for a lot of us, it’s not really a question; even on the Light Fellowship, we still must be really careful with budgeting, especially seeing as how some yet-undetermined amount of taxes will be cut out of our fellowship check at the end of the year. As much as I wanted to get a job in which I could use Japanese, I ended up getting a job teaching private in-home English lessons, which pays very well and allows me to work just a few hours per week and still receive the same amount as if I were working 10 hours at, say, a convenience store or restaurant. I found this job on Gaijinpot.com, which has a bunch of job listings specifically oriented towards foreigners.