5. Nanzan University: Center for Japanese Studies

a. Clay Bailey, Fall 2018 interim Report

This fall at Nanzan was more intense for me than either my summer at HIF this year or my summer at SUN Academy last year. I took on a heavy workload this semester, with the plan of having a lighter load next semester. While I did learn a lot as a result of the extra hours of class and study, I also felt that I missed out on a wealth of experience waiting for me beyond the university campus. Also, after spending the extra time at the university, I came to notice a few points about the learning environment that I took issue with, such as teaching styles and immersion environments. I plan to use my experience this semester to have a better and more fulfilling time in Japan next semester.

After taking the placement test during orientation, I was placed in Japanese 5. As the most advanced course, the accuracy of the placement is difficult to evaluate. Each of the 11 students in the class have their own strengths and weaknesses, so different aspects of the course were challenging to different people. The weakness of mine which my instructor and I discovered through this course exists in an abstract and hard-to-define sphere that was actually the source of a lot of frustration. On the level of sentence construction, especially at a high level like in an academic context, it is still difficult for me to express my thoughts in a way that is easily understood by native Japanese speakers. There was a lot of feedback on essays like, “it just isn’t said this way.” My instructor even suggested that I try going back to an intermediate textbook such as Tobira and digest those simpler sentences as fully as possible. In the end, we agreed that there was a fault in my study method up until now that focused on bite-sized chunks of Japanese, rather than expressing complete thoughts.

The Nanzan registration process at the beginning of the semester allows students to choose from a variety of elective classes in addition to their main Japanese class. There are English classes on Japanese areas studies, seminars conducted in Japanese, and classes in the arts, such as calligraphy and woodblock printing. I decided to enroll in five Japanese seminars in addition to my main Japanese course, putting myself at the maximum 18 credits per semester. These classes were: University Preparatory Japanese, Japanese in Tourism, Japanese Society and Law, Business Japanese, and Readings in Japanese Literature. Each of these seminars met once a week.

University Preparatory Japanese was a class oriented towards students at or around a JLPT N2 level with the aim of preparing students to pass the N1 test. The class used a grammar textbook and a packet with vocabulary and listening problems. Each week students learned about
10 new grammar points and around 50 related words on their own, then in class shared answers and practiced listening problems. The class was effective, as I saw many of the grammars and words discussed while taking the JLPT in December.

Japanese in Tourism was a seminar that focused on learning to use the especially polite language called for in the tourism and hospitality industries. It was taught by two teachers, including Doi Sensei from HIF. In class we would do things like listen to example speeches given by tour guides, change normal language in scripts into polite language, and memorize and practice speeches that we wrote ourselves. The class was fun and effective, culminating in a 10-minute final presentation about tourism around my hometown.

Japanese Society and Law was a seminar with about 5 foreign students and 15 Japanese Students. It is a class that the Japanese students in the Law Department must take for their major, and was the only class at Nanzan this semester which invited the foreign students to participate. Each week, a group of two to three students presented a topic related to constitutional law at the beginning of class, continuing with a discussion after the presentation. All students were required to turn in a research report at the end of the semester as well. I really enjoyed looking through the law textbook and case summaries for my presentation. As for the discussions, while there was little participation from the Japanese students, who were largely disengaged or shied away from speaking, I enjoyed talking with the professor in class. I think this is because of all all my instructors, he was the only one who was not trying to evaluate and improve my Japanese ability, but rather was trying to understand what I had to say in whatever way I could say it.

Business Japanese was a seminar designed to prepare students to enter the business world in Japan. The class taught for more than polite language, going so far as to teach how to job hunt, how to write resumes, how to exchange business cards, how to choose a seat in a room based on rank, and a whole host of other non-intuitive practices specific to the Japanese business world. The classroom materials were excellently prepared by the instructor, including relevant newspaper articles, diagrams and manuals. For me, the class came at the end of the week, so I was often too burnt out to fully engage, but upon reflection the class was both fun and informative.

Readings in Japanese Literature was aimed towards students in Japanese 3 and above, and looked at poems and excerpts from novels. The readings were quite manageable, and for homework there would be comprehension questions which students would submit online. The discussions were very interesting and I thought it was so cool to be able to discover many cultural differences with my classmates from China and Hong Kong. I found that the instructor’s view on the room within literature for interpretation was much more narrow than any other literature class that I have taken, which I believe limited the discussion.

Outside the university (although not far at all), my accommodations are quite pleasant. The international dorm this semester had about 12 Americans, 2 Chinese, 1 French and 4 Japanese. Given this makeup, the lingua franca of the dorm was English. This was an obstacle to the immersion that I sought, but I overcame that fairly well with the extra hours of study and an
effort to talk to the Japanese roommates. I had a lot of fun cooking my own food and learning Japanese recipes! Although the 7 Eleven next door did not encourage that habit, especially on busy days. I did manage to use the university facilities for exercise. The weightlifting equipment is much more limited than what you would typically find in America.

Next semester, I am going to take far fewer classes. I am planning to start an independent study rather than continue with Japanese 6, following the advice of my instructor. I am still trying to decide on the topic, but I would like to increase my rhetorical skill in the language more than anything, so perhaps a study of present-day Japanese orators. Moreover, I will look for a part-time job. I ended up taking on a 70-year-old pupil as an English teacher already, but I would like to look for a job in which I can talk to and interact with customers and coworkers. I will also join a club at the university. I am thinking either a music club or a martial arts club. Going forward, I am determined to have a more balanced lifestyle that is immersed in the local culture.

b. Emily Howell, Fall 2018 Interim Report

I began 2019 by watching the Netflix series Tidying Up with Marie Kondo. As it inspired me to clear out my closet and reevaluate my belongings, granting them importance based on whether they “sparked joy” for me or not, so too did the show inspire a desire to fill my semester with things that sparked joy. Reflecting on the past semester, I decided to travel more, have better focus on my Japanese classes, and organize my schedule to be able to experience more of Japan. So I returned to Nagoya, where I was studying at Nanzan University.

I lived again in the dorms close to campus, with two of the same roommates from last semester and one new one, from Columbia. This semester, we decided not to go in on groceries together and instead did all of our cooking and shopping separately (the exception being rice, for which we split the cost). This ended up being more expensive than last semester, as it’s more cost-effective to cook for multiple people than just for one, but I enjoyed the freedom of making my own food and not feeling guilty for adding unnecessary items to the grocery bill. I also wasn’t as close with my roommates this semester; my Japanese roommate, like last semester, was hardly home at all, and my Columbian roommate had friends from her home university also studying abroad with whom she spent her time.

Coming back to Japan from spending winter break in America with my family, I resolved to travel outside of Nagoya, the city in which I lived, at least once a month. In January, I went with a friend to Hidafurukawa, a town featured briefly in the popular film Your Name. While there, we visited many of the sites appearing in the movie, including the train station, a shrine, and a few street corners. Seeing the small town in the depths of winter was peaceful and beautiful. In February, I didn’t get a chance to leave Nagoya, but in March I travelled quite a bit.
Firstly, I accompanied other CJS students on a trip to Asuke, where we admired dolls set up for the doll’s festival and listened to the local high school band play. We broke up into groups with CJS students pairing with high schoolers. I found the small town very interesting, and loved to see all the little stores celebrating as well. That day, I also participated in a traditional Japanese arts workshop, and got to forge my own letter-opener. The blacksmith’s knives and other works were hung up around the workshop, and I admired them.

Later in the month, during my one-week break from classes, I travelled to Tokyo and Beppu. In Tokyo, I enjoyed the cherry blossoms, which were just hitting full bloom. I visited the Tokyo Sky Tree to view the city from above, which was an overpriced but overall pleasant experience. I visited some temples and shrines, and enjoyed people-watching at Shibuya Crossing. The hot springs in Beppu were very relaxing and enjoyable, exactly what I needed over spring break. My favorite part of the trip was definitely the train rides; while figuring out the schedules and where to get on the trains was sometimes nerve wracking, the scenery and placidness of the travel was enjoyable.

Through travel, however, I discovered that I don’t really enjoy travelling, at least not in a tourist’s capacity. I enjoyed living in Nagoya, but when travelling I missed the comfort of a bed I was used to and a kitchen I could cook in, especially since my dietary restrictions (I eat gluten free due to celiac disease) make eating while travelling quite a hassle. Figuring out where and what to eat, especially in Japan where those restrictions are not as catered to as in America, caused a lot of stress, detracting from the pleasures of sight-seeing and making for a more unpleasant experience overall. I decided to focus within Nagoya for the rest of the semester; I visited temples and shrines, the aquarium and harbor, and a few museums in the last couple months of my stay.

I enjoyed my classes this semester more than last semester. My Japanese class was structured differently, but writing an essay for each chapter developed my composition skills and made it easier for me to compose my thoughts in Japanese. We were more encouraged to speak Japanese from the moment we entered the classroom, which increased my comfort with the language. I also liked doing fewer long speeches this semester as opposed to more shorter ones last semester. Having to expand my thoughts and include specific grammar points in the speeches was excellent practice. One aspect of this semester’s Japanese class I truly enjoyed was having to act as “kanji sensei” multiple times over the semester, teaching kanji to the rest of the class through meanings, vocabulary, parts of the kanji, and mnemonics to help memorize the characters. It helped my memorization out a lot as well.

Outside of Japanese, I took translation again. This was one class that I preferred last semester over the spring semester; my translation skills were refined, but not by much, and I don’t believe that taking the class was necessary. Otherwise, I really enjoyed my classes in the traditional Japanese arts, hanga (woodblock printing) and odori (dance). I loved putting on a kimono every week in odori and learning dances both with and without a fan, as well as the proper way to walk when dressed traditionally. Though I struggled with thinking up what to
carve in hanga, I found learning techniques for carving and how to print the drawings very interesting. An additional class I took was Japanese Society, focused specifically on gender in Japanese society, both historically and presently. This was probably my favorite class of the semester; conducted in English, each week we read and presented to our classmates an academic article about gender in Japanese society. The discussions were intriguing and I learned so much about Japan’s history and politics, both inside and outside of the home.

c. Eric Margolis, Fall 2017 Final Report

CJS Nanzan level 600 gave me the best Japanese instruction I have experienced, although not the most rigorous. This is entirely thanks to my professor, Okada sensei, who is by far the best Japanese teacher I have ever had.

She rigorously challenged us to improve our reading comprehension, pronunciation, and the naturalness of our speaking and writing. Class with her was both enjoyable and intense, as we worked hard to formulate natural sentences in Japanese, not Anglicized ones; while also elevating our listening and reading abilities towards (but we didn't quite get there) literary, academic, and professional levels.

Mandatory Japanese class was 12 hours a week with about 1 hour of homework a night, unless there was an exam or a project (either an exam or a project about once a week) in which much more time was required. In general the Japanese program was more challenging than stressful, and did not feature a ridiculous amount of work from day-to-day, like some other programs do. We had readings almost every day and had to read them aloud to work on our pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. The one thing we didn't do a lot of is essays or listening exams, so I would call the class primarily reading and speaking focused.

The greatest thing about my class was that it was extremely international. This is one of the incredible benefits of CJS. My 12 person Japanese class had 1 German, 2 Brits, 1 Chinese, 1 Taiwanese, 1 Korean, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Thai, 1 Colombian, 1 Cambodian, and 1 other American. This was a more international proportion than the other classes, but the fact that it was even possible is extremely telling.

600 level is roughly equivalent to 4th year at Yale. It was a distinct Japanese education from Yale because our teacher focused on making our Japanese sound natural in terms of both grammar and pronunciation--you can't just get away with rattling off whatever phrases come to your mind. Fitting in is a big part of Japanese culture, and you're not going to be able to leave this program without getting your weird foreign-sounding Japanese corrected.

Nanzan also afford many, many opportunities for international exchange. I got to make so many Japanese friends in class (we talked with Japanese students every week), at clubs at Nanzan, at the AWESOME international lounges (there are literally three international lounges
at Nanzan. The Japanese lounge, the World Plaza, and Stella International Lounge) as well as international friends. My best friends were from, in no particular order: Nagoya, Montana, Navajo Reservation, Massachusetts, Germany, Sendai, Gifu.

I lived in a dorm with 15 international exchange students and 4 Japanese students 5 minutes from campus with private rooms and a shared living room/kitchen. It was a nice community environment and the Japanese students worked to throw parties and events for us. CJS offered a few trips and formal coffee hours, but most of the cultural engagement was led by students, either by the amazing people at Stella (international lounge), the dormitory leaders, or other student groups. Joining clubs in particular allowed me to branch out of my comfort zone into an all-Japanese environment not at all tailored towards foreigners. In terms of opportunities for cultural engagement, CJS met my expectations and exceeded them.

One particularly unique opportunity was being able to take a seminar conducted in both Japanese and English with 6 exchange students and 16 Japanese fourth-year students working on their senior theses. I learned a lot about international relations, experienced the Japanese education system, and made great friends. Our professor welcome us into his home and encouraged us to help the Japanese students with their theses. We had productive debates about the nuclear bombs that revealed many cultural differences in how these topics are perceived between America and Japan.

The big strength/weakness of CJS is that it's a large program, so it doesn't watch you too closely. If you chose to, you could spend your time hanging out with Americans and speaking English. But if you choose to you can make all Japanese friends. If you chose to, you could get away with only studying 1 hour a day. Or you can take an intense literature class, work extra hard on your projects, and go to lots of drinking-party-club meetings (people love club drinking meetings). If you are having trouble, it's up to YOU to go get help on your own. Help is there, but there's not necessarily anyone checking up on you, offering you opportunities to travel or to study. Self-initiative is needed, but the opportunities are nearly limitless.

There are also real international students at Nanzan- undergraduate and graduate students who have MOVED to Japan to study there, and who plan to work there after graduating. This is yet another type of person who it is really great to interact with and learn about their experience.

Personally, I joined jazz club and volunteer circle. I got to perform in jazz performances and meet a lot of students who had never spoken to a foreigner before, unlike the people who typically show up to international exchange events. Volunteer circle gave me the opportunity to volunteer at a local elementary school, which was fun and rewarding.

A lone weakness is that the elective classes are not necessarily guaranteed to be high quality compared to Yale classes on literature, history etc.. There are several that are excellent, but many elective classes are "meh". Fall semester also has no fall break, which can make the semester extremely tiring by the end of it, but this fatigue can be avoided merely by not grinding yourself into the ground as a lot of us Yalies commonly do.
I met more diverse people than I ever have at Yale through CJS--people from diverse economic and social backgrounds. Nagoya is also a clean, highly developed, and centrally located city. I had already traveled a lot in central Japan because of PII, but Nagoya afford easy access to: Osaka, Kyoto, Ise, Gifu, Nagano, Ishikawa, Fuji, Tokyo. Personally I traveled to Tokyo, Ise, Osaka, Nagano, and Lake Biwa, and that after my program Sapporo and Hakodate. I could not more strongly recommend Nanzan University's CJS.