

Project Report
Japan Studies Institute 2019

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I feel deeply honored to have been selected for the 2019 Japan Studies Institute. I will have completed 22 years at University of North Alabama this year where I started my career as a faculty member in the Department of Social Work, and currently serve in an administrative role as the Senior Associate VP for Academic Affairs. I also teach undergraduate classes and lead a summer leadership class for entering freshmen.

With a passion for global issues and undergraduate education, I feel deeply honored to have been selected for the Japan Studies Institute.

There is much that I have learned in this short period that will enrich and inform my work about Japan at many levels – both in my teaching of undergraduate students, and in my administrative role.

The word “learning” here is important in many ways. I applied to the program as a Student to learn about Japanese culture, history, people, and its current place in the world economy. I have always been fascinated by Japan – and I am most thankful to JSI for this once in a lifetime opportunity. I am specially grateful to AASCU for its vision to support a program that allows US faculty members to participate in such opportunities – “partnerships” a key word we have heard again and again.

To share a bit of my background, I grew up in India, studied in Canada, and work in the United States. Needless to say, I am a big believer in the internationalization of Education. I serve on the Commission of Global Education of the Council on Social Work Education, and infusing global issues in the curriculum and the college experience for every student is a priority of my institution.

So, what have I learned that will allow me to incorporate what I have learned into my teaching and administrative work?

As an administrator, a priority of my institution is the internationalization of our campus through cultural competence, language education, study abroad opportunities, faculty exchange, developing partnerships, and providing support for our Japanese students on campus. Each of these aspects has been an important element of the JSI program.

As a faculty member, training undergraduate students to become professional social workers, cultural competence, respect for diversity, and understanding the socio-economic and political context of global issues are at the core of the curriculum – again aspects of which have been covered extensively in this program.

As a result of attending the JSI Institute, I am better equipped to integrate knowledge on Japanese history, government, education, economics, and society including gender roles, demographic changes, and work-life balance – into my class on comparative global issues.

I have learned that the Japanese language, with its subtle nuances, respect for authority, courtesy, and kindness, gently lubricate the fabric of daily life – important lessons on communication for the millennial generation in my classroom.

Depression and anxiety are at epidemic levels among American college youth today. From the lessons on Japanese architecture, the Japanese garden, and the knowledge on Buddhism, I would share with my students that life is asymmetrical, to learn to accept imperfections, and cultivate a sense of thankfulness for everyday life. I plan to introduce meditation – to start each class with two minutes of mindfulness – to remind students that self-care is important to one's well-being.

As a result of this program, I have a better understanding of the educational system in Japan that will help me provide better support to our Japanese students on campus; and support Study Abroad Programs to Japan.

And, on a personal level, I am reminded of the deep sense of gratitude for – my fellow JSI fellows, our Sensei, and all of you present here today who have made this amazing opportunity possible – Naman Dao!

A special thanks to AASCU, the Nippon Foundation, the Japan-US Friendship Commission, and to President de la Torre and SDSU for so generously hosting this excellent program on your beautiful campus.

I will end with a Haiku as a form of spontaneous expression of feelings:

The Universe Conspired and we came together
Tomorrow we disperse
To sow seeds of wisdom in minds, young and old;
May we stay connected and
Find peace in our common humanity.

Arigato Gozaimashta!