

2019 AASCU Japan Studies Institute
Curriculum Development Project Summary
Incorporating Japan Studies into the Interior Design Curriculum
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I am a faculty at the interior design program at the Wilson School of Design at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) in Richmond, BC, Canada. The interior design program is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). The program recognizes travel as having deep educational value, and as long as the degree has been in place, there has been a required field school course to international destinations as part of the curriculum. In addition to contributing to the internationalization of KPU and the interior design degree, the inclusion of this component in the program has proven effective in providing a full-spectrum design education. In this Design Field School, students engage in an intensive study in another country for a period of two weeks; classes before and after the trip contextualize their learning by the analysis and critical reflection of their expectations before travel, and of their field experiences after.

Our CIDA accreditation requires that students demonstrate an understanding of how social, economic, cultural, and physical contexts inform interior design. Additionally, KPU's Academic Plan acknowledges that "we must continue to make tangible efforts to decolonize our approaches" to education. To support these drivers, the department has established a rotation between European and non-European destinations. It is my hope that our next non-Western, Asian itinerary takes place in Japan.

By researching and traveling to Japan, learners will broaden their knowledge and understanding of human behaviour by making connections between design solutions and their immediate contexts. Students will experience how culture, climate, geography, and history have influenced the development of design in Japan. They will visit design projects in significant locations such as Tokyo and Kyoto, gaining insight into the cultural history of the region as well as interdisciplinary skills in creativity, design thinking, academic inquiry, and cultural awareness. Student teams will conduct pre-departure research projects in topics such as Japanese sense of place; politics of space and political aesthetics; the production of conceived, perceived, and lived spaces; and multi-sensory aesthetics. They will also select an area of personal interest for a self-directed research study project to be completed while in Japan: Topics could include Japanese poetry, nature and religious spaces, wabi-sabi and the built environment, comparisons between Japanese and North American design processes, analysis of the social character of Tokyo neighbourhoods, cultural connections of music to the design of performance spaces, analysis of the experiential quality of scale in varied building typologies, etc.

Japan has historically been known to be a design powerhouse and including it as part of the Design Field School itinerary is a perfect fit for facilitating the development of intercultural competence and global design skills in our students.