

My name is Jacob Werschey, and I studied at Tokyo Gakugei University under the Japanese Studies Students scholarship from October 2013 to August 2014.

I am currently a CIR (Coordinator for International Relations) with the JET Programme in Asahikawa, Hokkaido. I really do not think I would have been able to get CIR without the MEXT experience. It really enriched my experience socially and scholastically.

Getting the scholarship was something I was very pleasantly surprised to hear about. I sent the forms off and I didn't hear anything back for quite a while and then I got notified that I had received the scholarship out of what seemed like nowhere. I was convinced that I had turned the forms incorrectly or that I was not up to par. I encourage those thinking of applying to do so, and to have faith that you will get it. It's good to have a backup plan just in case but remember that a lack of reply does not necessarily mean you are out of the running.

I think the best part was that studying in Japan made me more friends from countries outside of Japan with the common language being Japanese. I was the only scholarship recipient from the United States in my group. This was great because the scholarship recipients lived in a separate dorm with Japanese students away from campus and other exchange students. It was really nice to be in an environment where everyone was really focused on speaking Japanese because we were all in the same boat. It was a really diverse group of people. There were 4 Vietnamese students, 4 from mainland China, 1 French, 2 Russian, 1 Mongolian, 2 Thai, 1 South Korean, 1 Polish, 1 Slovakian, 1 Swedish, 1 Indian. In the very beginning, people tended to gravitate towards people from the same or surrounding countries. It was thanks to some people (namely the French and South Korean students) actively seeking to involve everyone in everything that made such cohesion within the group possible. If you are reading this now and end up being a scholarship recipient, I encourage you to be one of these people who is incredibly sociable and

who brings the group together. It is important that while you are over in Japan to remember that this is not only a chance learn about Japan, but the world, and making these connections are really important.

Everyone having to write a research paper in Japanese was something that was pretty intimidating at first but we had a lot of moral support from the other people in the group as well as hands-on support from teachers at TGU. There were several guidance counselors that met with us to check our progress with our paper as well as brainstorm and help us move it along. I was fortunate enough to have a guidance counselor that started meeting people in her group early in the year to have us think about what we wanted to write about. The research paper was also one more factor that pushed the Japanese learning process along.

As for cultural learning and exchange, in addition to having to take a minimum amount of credits towards culture classes, there were a variety of events and workshops that were for those under the MEXT and other scholarships. This included things like touring the older parts of Tokyo, going to an architectural museum, going to see a sumo tournament, seeing a rakugo performance, furoshiki workshop, etc.

One of the best exchange activities was going to an elementary school and playing tag with a whole bunch of kids. There were other times we went to schools and introduced our countries to a class and maybe even played some games here and there but, this time, we got to interact at a much more energetic level.

The whole experience was really amazing. I met a bunch of people from all over the world and a pretty good amount of them I can say with confidence that they will be my lifelong friends. I often look back on it fondly as a time where things were kind of perfect in that I had a solid

group of friends that were all striving for a common goal. Even within the group of scholarship recipients, the Japanese levels were all over the place. I was actually the worst in the beginning but thanks to those who were better around me along with the excellent teaching staff at TGU I felt like I was able to progress leaps and bounds.

The perks and responsibilities of the scholarship made for a perfect balance of motivations to make the best use of my time in Japan. The research paper, although incredibly stressful at times, is something that can be very worthwhile depending on what you decide to study. And while the academic part of the scholarship is important and obvious, it is important to remember that through the scholarship you will be meeting some really incredible people whether it be teaching staff, other scholarship recipients, etc.