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2018 MEXT Scholarship Recipient

Bunka Fashion College, Tokyo, Japan

I had the honor and privilege of studying at Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo in 2018, as a recipient of the MEXT Specialized Training College Student Scholarship. I first became aware of the MEXT Scholarship program as a high school student, yet I made the decision to enter a bachelor's degree program and did not apply until several years later. As I had studied abroad in Tokyo during my second year of college, my time at Bunka was my second opportunity to live and study in Japan, a fact for which I am infinitely grateful. To put it plainly, the program exceeded my expectations of how significant an academic and personal experience could be in nearly every imaginable way. The time I spent in Tokyo as a MEXT recipient continues to have a profound influence on how I approach the world around me, and I struggle to envision the person I would be today if not for that period in my life.

I had the good fortune of being placed in Bunka's dormitory housing in Kodaira, a suburb west of central Tokyo. Living here, I had ample opportunities to interact with and befriend students in the college's Japanese language course, as well as those in Bunka's four-year undergraduate degree programs, including fashion design, styling, fashion business, and other specialties. As most of the students in the dormitory were native Japanese speakers, I was able to practice the language in a naturalistic setting daily, chatting with friends about the happenings of the day and arranging weekend excursions to Harajuku or Koenji. Aesthetically, I resided in a very beautiful, peaceful suburban environment, and I felt continually inspired by my daily walk to and from the train. Some weekends I walked for hours, alone or with friends, as a means of exploration and relaxation.

Bunka Fashion College's campus, just shy of the south exit Shinjuku Station, also provided a stimulating and motivating environment. The level of creativity displayed by Bunka's student body

simply by their manner of dress is incredible. The ten-minute walk from Shinjuku station to the Bunka campus each morning was an event in and of itself, as well-dressed students moved en masse toward the first classes of the day. The campus had a very particular atmosphere where self-expression and sharing of ideas were essentially innate. Picking up useful Japanese phrases and improving my ability to converse in a confident manner came easily in this setting, as I found nearly everyone whom I encountered to be gracious and patient enough to tolerate my often-awkward Japanese speech. I have countless fond memories of my friends, on-campus as well as in the dormitory, many of whom I remain in close contact with and am looking forward to seeing again during my next trip to Tokyo.

By way of these friends and connections I was met with many unexpected opportunities. I modelled for a student project, visited a close friend's family in Hokkaido over the Christmas holiday, attended Dior's pre-fall fashion show and afterparty (featuring a massive robotic sculpture by Hajime Sorayama) and appeared twice on the television program *Matsuko Kaigi*, a particularly amusing fact to my family back in the US. My advice to future MEXT recipients, based upon my own experience, would be to expect the unexpected. Keep an open mind and try to limit your imaginings of what your time in Japan will be like; it will likely far exceed them in ways you cannot possibly predict.



With friends after a celebratory night out at a local izakaya



*My wonderful head teacher
Kakumoto-sensei and I after the
college's Japanese speech contest*



*I participated as a model in a
collaboration between friends in the
college's styling and photography
departments*