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My academic experience during Saitama University's summer program consisted of two fascinating classes about Japanese traditional and contemporary art and material culture. The Japanese traditional and contemporary art class consisted of both in-class lectures and field trips including visits to a museum, a manga studio, a film studio, and a animation studio. Such trips truly enhanced my overall learning experience for this class because I got the opportunity to talk to actual Japanese artists about their career and see the beautiful and ancient traditional youkai art of Japan with my very own eyes. As for the class about Japanese material culture, we had one field trip to a Japanese baseball game in Tokyo. This was quite the experience for me because I got to compare and contrast the audience reaction to the game to the reaction I'm used to in a Red Sox game. It was fascinating because it felt so familiar and yet so different at the same time!

Besides this field trip my Japanese material culture class consisted of analyzing objects such as plushies of Japanese mascots, Japanese food, and Japanese fashion. Finally, along with these Japanese culture classes, I also took a class for learning the Japanese language, which was intensive but a great help to my everyday life in Japan such as ordering food, purchasing items, and asking for directions. Overall I felt the quality of these courses were on par with the courses I've taken at UMass Boston though I found the difficulty to be much easier, which is to be expected since one of the program's goals was to give us enough time to go out and explore Japan. As for my classmates, they were all truly special people. We all had such a wonderful time together because everyone was willing to accept each other's personalities and different culture backgrounds. I have a feeling that we'll all be keeping in touch with each other because the bond we made as a group in just four weeks truly was a strong one.

The people of Japan are very kind, hardworking, reserved, polite, and always willing to help. I had so many wonderful experiences that led to me having this conclusion about Japanese people. For example, the students of Saitama University who understand and speak English did absolutely everything in their power to make sure the people in my program were having fun and were safe at all times. It never felt like we were a chore either because they all truly wanted to make friends with us, learn about our culture, and, of course, practice their English and leadership skills. They all did a wonderful job and I am forever grateful to them for making this study abroad experience an absolute blast.

Would I recommend this study abroad program to my fellow UMass Boston students? I think from what I've written so far the answer should be obvious. Yes. Even though this was Saitama University's second time having the summer program, the price, the international house, the field trips, and the community were all wonderful experiences to me. They provided the cost of our trip to Kawagoe, for example, which is a historical town of Japan with lots of traditional food, gift shops, and atmospheric buildings. We did, however, have to pay for wearing a kimono, which is the traditional clothing of Japan. But this was optional and the program also provided us

tour guides for when we walk around which was nice because the students in charge of our group also had never been to Kawagoe and didn't know the history. Finally, although my room in the international house was very nice and clean, it was also a room in the 3rd building, which is not as old as the 1st building. I often visited friends in the 1st building and, unfortunately, their rooms were definitely not as nice. For example, there were definitely a few cockroaches roaming around. The only insect I encounter in my room was one medium-sized jumping spider.

The experiences I gained from this study abroad adventure has greatly increased the confidence I have in myself. The fact that I could go to another country (one that is 13 hours ahead in time) by myself and live there for four weeks has finally made me realize that I am an independent person and I don't always have to rely on my family and friends at home to have a good time. I can go out by myself, I can make new friends, and I can feel safe all at the same time because I have the ability to make good decisions. I trust myself more than ever and I am using this newly gained confidence to search for a job. Although I have yet to find one, I truly believe that the process is going much smoother because of the confidence I have gained and I thank the experiences I had in Japan and the wonderful people I met there for this strength. Please come to Japan and see for yourself how fascinating, kind and hardworking the people and culture can be.