

HECTOR SANTIAGO, JAPAN, 2012

Brookdale Community College
New Jersey

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INTERNATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIP



I learned something new every single day in Japan; whether it was about the people, the food, the culture, or myself. I loved learning Japanese and I spent a lot of time studying. Although I am not a "natural" language learner, I surpassed even my own expectations. I feel much more comfortable and confident reading and writing in Japanese than I do speaking, but that could be because I practiced writing nearly three times as much.

Living with my homestay family, I learned about family values and traditions in Japan. On weekends, we went for picnics in the park, sang karaoke, and did some shopping at the department store. At home, we had dinner every night at 7pm. I took my shoes off as

soon as I entered the house and I announced myself when coming or going from the house. All of these customs were new to me; yet, I have continued practicing in America.

I took several cooking classes, in which I learned how to prepare some of the most amazing food I have ever eaten. In those classes, I also made friends with Japanese college students, some of whom I still communicate with. These classes taught me to work in a group with strangers and work together to complete tasks. It was a lesson in cooperation and adaptation that has helped me work with people even better at home in the U.S.

When I was in Japan, I also attended a lecture on Japanese psychology by a Japanese professor. The professor said to us, "Japanese people are horrible at communication. We know we are. But we communicate well with each other because we understand how we communicate." After hearing this, I could sort of recognize what he was saying and it gave me a better understanding of how to communicate with Japanese people.

I have absolutely grown as a person. My will to communicate with others has grown tremendously. I learned a new language and was able to assimilate into another culture. I worked harder than ever in my classes, and overall, I just feel much better about myself.

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Since studying abroad, not only have my goals become clearer, but I am more motivated than ever. I have decided that not only do I want to work in International Education, but I want to work in a community college. There, I plan to increase cultural awareness on a larger scale and advocate for funding for international programs in community colleges; a group that is largely underrepresented in education abroad.

FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

My Follow-on Service Project was to give presentations to students, sharing my experience abroad and promoting the Gilman Scholarship Program. I presented for the International Education Centers at both my community college and

Kent University, where I transferred to, my former Japanese class, and the students at my karate school. Also, I have received a lot of emails from students from all over the country who were very interested in my

blog, asking for information and tips about their upcoming journey abroad. I love reaching out to students and inspiring them to go after their dreams, like I did. If I can do it, I know they can do it too.