Meiji Gakuin University (Tokyo, Japan) Fall 2015 Exchange Report

I am a 3rd year student studying in the Beedie School of Business and during the Fall 2015 semester, I went on a one-semester exchange to Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan. In Japan, the school semesters start and end differently compared to SFU’s. The school term officially started on September 18, 2015 and ended on January 19, 2016.

Preparing for the Exchange

In early July 2015, I received my acceptance package from the Meiji Gakuin University. A VISA was required for me to go on exchange to Japan. I applied for one at the Japanese Consulate in downtown, Vancouver. The Student VISA to Japan was free of charge and took approximately a week to process. Also, I was required to do an overseas wire transfer to the school’s bank account in order to pay for my dorm fees. Japanese banks have a 2500 yen service charge for doing overseas transfers so be sure to include that amount to the total. Detailed instructions will also be provided in the Dorm Rent Invoice found in the acceptance package.

Additionally, included in the acceptance package is the dorm agreement, the weekend-homestay program form and the buddy program form. The weekend-homestay program and the buddy program is optional, but highly recommended. I definitely recommend joining the buddy program as each exchange student is assigned 2-3 buddies and they will help you adjust to the new environment, help you with opening a phone and bank account, and assist with getting the student discount for your train pass.

Arrival

In the itinerary sheet or schedule of the entire duration of the semester found in the acceptance package, it will list two dates in which you can arrive to the dorm by. In my case, I had to arrive to the dorm either on September 9 or September 10. I recommend arriving in Haneda airport rather than
Narita airport because it is closer to the dorm and it will be cheaper to travel there with the train system. In the package, there will also be instructions as to how to get to the dorm from both airports by train. I do not recommend taking a taxi from the airport to the dorm unless absolutely necessary because it will be very expensive.

**Dormitory**

Meiji Gakuin University has two campuses, the Shirokane campus (Tokyo) and the Yokohama campus. As an exchange student from SFU, I was automatically placed in the Shirokane campus as it is the only campus that offers the “Intensive Japanese Program.” The school runs an off-campus co-ed dormitory near Midorigaoka station. The dorm has a shared common space in the basement with a television in addition to a kitchen for any of the students to use. The kitchen is stocked with cooking utensils, plates, pans, cups, etc. There are a couple of grocery stores and convenience stores near the dorm. There are washrooms on all floors, but the shower rooms, washers, and dryers are only on the basement level. WI-Fi is also only available on the basement floor. However, each room has an LAN cable for the students to connect to the internet with.

**Orientation**

During the first day of orientation, the teachers will come to dorm in the morning and transit with students to the school. Students will also meet with their assigned buddies. On that day they will give you a tour of the campus, help you open a bank account, and help you apply for the student discount for your train pass. The buddies will recommend opening a bank account with Yuucho (a bank that is almost always located next to a post office). However, if you are staying in Japan for less than 6 months, they will not allow you to do overseas wire transfers. This bank account is only for the purpose of depositing scholarships (ie. JASSO). If you require more Japanese yen, you can withdraw some with
foreign credit cards at any 7 eleven convenience store. Another option is to bring some American dollars
with you and exchange it at a bank.

Your buddies can also help you open a cellphone if you do require one. However, unless you
plan to get a part-time job or purchase orders online, it is not necessary to open a phone. What I did was
I just brought my unlocked smart phone from home and bought a 5GB (per month) SIM card.
Communication with the teachers, the buddies, and my dorm mates were all done through an app called
Line. WI-FI is not as easily accessible in Japan than it is in Canada, so a data SIM card will be helpful.
Some knowledge of Japanese and a credit card is required to activate (and deactivate it later on) the SIM
card online.

Classes

I went to Meiji Gakuin with the intention of learning and improving my Japanese. This school
provides the “intensive Japanese Program” which is designed for that purpose. A placement test is
required for all of the exchange students and the results determine the student’s appropriate Japanese
class he or she must take. The placement test will be held after the 2nd day of orientation. In addition to
the Japanese language classes, I took three more elective courses in order to meet the minimum unit
requirement set out by the school. Although I chose to take all of my courses at the Shirokane campus,
students are free to take courses in the Yokohama campus as well. Although the semester officially
started on September 18th, exchange students were given two weeks to choose which courses they
wanted to attend. During those two weeks, the students can attend any class they find interesting and
within that time, submit a physical copy of their timetable schedule with their finalized course selection
to the International Center.

Unless placed in Intensive Japanese Class 5 or 6, the Japanese classes are mandatory and held
five times a week. These classes focus on grammar, speaking, reading, composition writing, and kanji.
Only exchange students are permitted to take the Intensive Japanese classes so the classes are very small. Other elective classes are held once a week and are mainly arts courses. Depending on the elective, it may be taught in English, half English half Japanese, or completely in Japanese. Japanese students will also be taking these elective courses.

**Reflection after Exchange**

Not only did I achieve my goal of learning more and improving my Japanese, I made a lot of really close friends during my time in Japan, whom I still keep in contact with even after the exchange has ended. I was really lucky that everyone in the dorm became friends with each other and was motivated to learning the language. Because of this reason we were also all able to get to know and spend more time with the Japanese buddies (even outside of school).

Now that I think about things, the courses I took at Meiji Gakuin would be quite difficult if I did not already know some Japanese prior to going to on exchange. The most difficult part about the whole experience was balancing between studying for quizzes and tests and going on new adventures to new places in Tokyo. However, although it was stressful at times, I still really enjoyed my time at Meiji Gakuin University and I genuinely wish I could have stayed there longer.
Photos

The desk comes with a lamp, small moveable cabinet and a chair and it is next to the closet.

The Lawson convenience store 30 seconds away from the dorm (by foot)

One side of Meiji Gakuin University (Shirokane Campus)
A group photo of all of the exchange students and the Japanese teachers from the Japanese Intensive Program during the class fieldtrip to Nikko.