I major in Linguistics and I wanted to keep up with the three languages that I already know instead of learning a new language. Even though I was born in Canada, my mother is Japanese and I lived in Japan through age 4 to 8, so Japanese is the first language that I learned to speak. However, my ability to read and write is more limited. I wanted to be able to use Japanese in academic level so I decided to study Japanese in Kansai Gaidai, Osaka for the semesters in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012. This university happened to be located close to where I lived when I was little. I saw this as a good opportunity to see my grandparents and catch up with my childhood friends. Since I already have lived in the area of my study abroad destination, this report might not be much of a help to most future exchange students. Nonetheless, some parts of the report could be useful anyways and there might be other students like me.

I was already experiencing the exchange differently from most exchange students before even leaving Canada. Kansai Gaidai asked me to enter Japan with my Japanese passport because I have dual nationality. Even though I was intending to go to Japan as a Canadian with student visa, Kansai Gaidai wanted me to leave Canada with my Canadian passport and enter Japan with my Japanese passport so that they would have one less confirmation of enrollment to send to an exchange student. Kansai Gaidai told me that having Japanese nationality has advantages, such as not having to wait three months before looking for a part-time job and being eligible to Japanese National Health Insurance. But it turns out that Kansai Gaidai will discourage you from working during the first semester regardless you have Japanese

A peculiar statue by a hotel
nationality or not. Also, you can apply for National Health Insurance as foreigner anyways. I just wish that Kansai Gaidai would have let me known that I needed my Japanese passport earlier, because it complicated things when buying my airline tickets.

One little disadvantage of owning Japanese nationality is that I was no longer eligible to get Jasso scholarship and a couple other scholarships in Japan. So I made sure to save up as much money as I could and enter for bursary and scholarships at SFU. I was legally allowed to get a part-time job, but the school discourages you to get a job because you are there to study, not to get a part-time job. Living in Japan is not very expensive if you are not planning to out too much, but you are there to have fun too. You can spend less than ¥20000 per month on food if you want to save up, but if you like to eat out then it can go up to ¥30000 per month. Nonetheless, you can still eat out affordably if you are not a picky eater. School cafeteria also has low-cost meals, but they are mostly Japanese food. If you do not like Japanese food all that much, there is McDonald’s and a convenience store that sells sandwiches. If you like to go out a lot not just for food, but for entertainment as well, you might be going to karaoke a lot with your fellow Kansai Gaidai local and exchange students. There are karaoke places in Hirakata where you can sing for up to 6-8 hours for 400 - 800 yen if you go during the free-time hours. It may cost you twice the price if you go outside of the free-time hours. Hirakata is conveniently located in the outskirts of Osaka, so you can go to the center of Osaka, Kyoto or Nara all within 1-2 hours and visit many tourist areas.
The most expensive expense in Japan will probably be transportation and the system works quite differently from Canada’s public transportation. In B.C., you will only have to pay for certain zone and you can even get a day pass if you plan to use the transit a lot in one day. You also get to use the same ticket to get on the bus as well as skytrain or seabus because they are all part of Translink. In Japan, buses and trains are part different companies, so you will have to pay every time you transfer from a bus to a train or even when transferring to different company’s trains. In Canada, you get U-pass as a university student which saves you so much money. But in Japan, you might only be able to get a discounted fare for trains if you have to commute to school. Otherwise, you have to pay the full price every time you get on a train. If you like to go out a lot, it will be a good idea to buy a used bicycle during your stay. There are many places where you can ride your bicycle to instead of taking the bus or train.

During the arrival period, Kansai Gaidai offers free accommodation at their seminar houses whether you are planning on staying there or not for the rest of the semester. It may be a good chance to meet other exchange students, but I decided to stay at my grandparents. I stayed there for a couple months and then decided to move out to an apartment of my own. There are affordable one-room apartments for rent located near the campus. It is easy to look for a place to rent just by going to one of the real estate agencies nearby the campus. There is one agency right outside the campus
called Michio Housing that offers a no service charge to Kansai Gaidai students. Many places require you to pay a type of key money called 礼金 reikin which may cost between ¥50000 and ¥100000, but more and more real estates agencies are starting to offer places with no reikin. I did not mind this fee so much and I was more interested in finding a place that already had internet already set up and came with some appliances such as washing machine, refrigerator, air conditioner, stove and microwave. It would be troublesome to have to buy all these things and then having to get rid of them when moving out. If you are already accustomed to Japanese culture and know the language, I recommend renting your own apartment as it gives you more freedom than seminar houses or homestay and can be less costly.

Kansai Gaidai’s Asian Studies Program offers Japanese language courses in the morning and in the the afternoon Asian Studies courses instructed in English. The levels of Japanese courses range from 1 being the beginner course and 7 the most advanced. If you already have taken JLPT(Japanese Language Proficiency Test) N1 and wish to improve your Japanese at academic level, you might find the most advanced course offered there will be easy for you. I only had passed JLPT N2, so the Japanese courses at level 7 were just right for me. There are many extra-curricular activities at school such as clubs and circles. If you are going to join a club, make sure you are going to be determined to go to every meeting. Circles are more laid back so you will not have to be as determined. Most clubs and circles do not have fees, but the Aikido circle that I joined has a monthly fee of 4000 yen because they had an actual Aikido teacher coming in to instruct. I did not really like about Kansai Gaidai events that try to create opportunity for exchange students to make friend with the local Japanese students,
because Japanese students who participate in those kind of events are looking to meet exchange students that actually look foreign. I am half Japanese and speak fluent Japanese, so they were not as excited to meet me as other exchange students. Thus, I think clubs and circles are better ways to make Japanese friends that share common interests with you. However, I only went to the Aikido class for about a month and decided to join a Capoeira group outside of school because I was more interested in Capoeira as martial arts.

Due to the tsunami and the earthquake that happened that year on March in Northern Japan, there were less exchange students coming to study at Kansai Gaidai, even though Kansai area was unaffected. My Japanese classes for the Fall semester only had 6 students including myself, but the small class size allowed us to get each other know better and the some of my best friends that I made during the exchange are from this class. I am very grateful that I was able to go on an exchange and study at Kansai Gaidai. I was able to rediscover Japan as an adult and decide where I want to live. Staying there for 9 months gave me the opportunity to see the similarities and differences between Canada and Japan closely. I learned so much about school, people including myself and life in general through this opportunity that I would not have otherwise. I would recommend studying at Kansai Gaidai if you are thinking of studying in Japan whether you have Japanese background or not.

A bamboo forest in Arashiyama, Kyoto