

The 35th START Program (Australia)

For a little over two weeks from September 2 to September 19, 2016, 30 first-year undergraduate students took part in the 35th START Program*. Led by Associate Professor Aaron Claude Sponseller (Graduate School of Education) and two other faculty members, the students went to Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia.

Throughout their time at Flinders University, after being divided into groups of ten the students worked and studied under the guidance of three instructors at the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI). They took lessons on practical English as well as regular classes on Australian history and culture together with local students. As the focus of this program is the exploration of expressing opinions in English, the participants made efforts to improve their English abilities as much as possible in the limited time of two weeks. During the program they participated in discussions with local students every day, worked with their host families on class assignments, and through coming into firsthand contact with a different culture were able to experience what it is actually like to live in a foreign country. In the beginning, participants who had yet to adjust to life in a foreign country had a hard time communicating using English and encountering cultural differences. However, after spending a fulfilling time in Australia many of them showed the reluctance to leave on the last day.

The participants were also able to experience a range of things even outside the classroom.

First of all, they visited a local elementary school twice where they enjoyed interacting with the children. On the second visit especially, they demonstrated traditional Japanese plays such as *origami* (the art of folding paper into various figures), *fukuwarai* (a game similar to "pin the tail on the donkey") and *ayatori* (string figure) in English. In the end, their careful preparations paid off, and the children enjoyed it very much.

The participants also visited the commercial districts and the market of Adelaide and experienced the local people's daily life.

On one weekend, the students spent one night and two days at Kangaroo Island. Amongst unspoiled nature they were able to enjoy magnificent scenery and wildlife that cannot be seen in Japan, and, blessed with fine weather, at

night had a clear view of the starry sky. They were also able to purchase a variety of souvenirs from local industries. To them, this trip to Kangaroo Island became one of the highlights of this START program.

On the last day of their study abroad, in groups of five the students made presentations in English on six topics (“multiracial society”, “politics and economy, “environment and resources”, “sport culture” and “beach culture”). In addition to pre-departure preparations, the groups had prepared for this day by interviewing dozens of local students and organizing presentation materials. Each group presented their topics making full use of the skills they had learnt at the local lectures and displaying impressive improvement in the quality of their presentation skills. Students who had previously been unconfident in voicing their opinions showed very positive attitudes and asked lots of questions, bringing the research aspect of the START program to a successful conclusion.

Furthermore, each student was assigned to a different host family during their stay in Australia. Through interaction with their host families they experienced the difference in values and cultures, and on weekends many families took them on trips around their city, giving each student unique experiences that could not be had in the classroom.

On the last evening, a farewell party was held for the students with their teachers and host families. The students, many of whom appeared overwhelmed with emotion, gave words of thanks to their teachers and were presented certificates of completion by their instructors from IELI.

After returning to Japan, at the program follow-up session all participants made a presentation on their impressions of the program and expressed their intentions on how they would apply what they had learned to the future. Comments included “I want to make preparations for a long-term study abroad.” and “I would like to study my own field using English.” As seen above, many of them showed significant growth and were looking to move on to the next step.

After the completion of this program each participant will continue studying English, working towards achieving their individual target scores for the TOEIC test. The participants’ progress is not, however, limited to their improvement in language skills, but also their growth as a human being – beyond this, their experience will open doors to new possibilities for the future. It is expected that

the participants of this program will all become highly competent personnel who carry the future of Hiroshima University.



A classroom discussion



Interview with local students



Adelaide Central Market



On the beach of Kangaroo Island