

The 41st START Program (New Zealand)

From March 10th to 26th 2017, thirty first-year students along with Associate Professor Robert Horst Taferner (Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences) and two other supervising faculty members participated in the 41st START program, studying abroad at New Zealand partner university University of Auckland (UoA) for around two weeks.

At UoA's Faculty of Education and Social Work, the students were split into three groups and spent their mornings taking ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. From three supervising teachers they learnt English vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and conversational expressions, and in preparation for their final presentation, how to gather data, write drafts, and organize presentations. In the afternoons they attended lectures run by UoA faculty members on New Zealand history, culture, education, and also participated in regular classes for UoA students. These classes were conducted entirely in English, and the students initially hesitated to voice opinions and ask questions. However, learning the importance of active participation and asking questions, the students worked to overcome their fears and became active participants in their classes.

The students also had the chance to give a presentation about Japanese culture at a local elementary school. Thanks to the student's diligent preparation and brush-ups from their supervisors, the presentation was a great success, resulting in a valuable cross-culture experience for both the elementary and university students alike.

The students also had many chances to experience New Zealand outside of the classroom – they visited a museum, a dormant volcano, a facility recreating the era of early immigration, and went sight-seeing in an area that displayed New Zealand's characteristically gorgeous natural scenery. By coming into first-hand contact with New Zealand's diverse history and culture, the students were able to gain experience incomparable to what they had pre-learnt in Japan.

In a culmination of what they had learnt over their two-week study period, the students organized final group presentations relating to some aspect of New

Zealand culture. In addition to the advance preparation they had conducted in Japan, each group crafted their presentations through personalized methods, such as distributing questionnaires to UoA students and homestay families, and recounting personal experiences. After their presentations they fielded active questions and remarks, and received positive feedback from UoA teachers.

During the study abroad period, each student participated in a homestay with a local family. As most students had never had a homestay experience, they initially expressed worry and uncertainty about living with their host family. However, persevering through English conversations and approaching each day with an open mind, the students able to make significant personal progress and spend an enjoyable two weeks with their families. On the day of their return to Japan, the students were able to meet for one last time with their host families. During this time they expressed their gratitude to their families for supporting them during their stay in an unfamiliar country, and regret at their imminent separation. Many students were moved to tears from emotion. Along with experiencing English conversation and cross-cultural exchange, students were touched by the warmth of their host families and were able to form personal bonds that transcended culture and ethnicity, a truly invaluable life experience.

After returning to Japan, in the post-study abroad session each student gave a three minute presentation in English. Many students commented that “I want to continue to study English here in Japan”, “I want to challenge myself by studying overseas for a longer period of time”, and “I gained valuable experience through this program”. Students also expressed their determination to use their gained experience to make further progress in their student lives and realize future aspirations.



During an ESL lesson



Talking with UoA students



Introducing Japanese culture to elementary students



At the immigration-era recreation facility