

Kansai Gaidai Exchange Program

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For over thirty years Kansai Gaikokugo Daigaku (Kansai Gaidai) has provided American students with a well-rounded initial encounter with Japan. Today students from all over the world make up the foreign student community on the Gaidai campus. The school maintains exchange relationships with colleges all over the U.S., Europe, Africa, South America, and Australia. This undergraduate diversity enhances the fine academic and cultural program Gaidai continues to develop in response to the changing needs and interests of students coming from abroad. Thirty years ago the curriculum was largely limited to language study and the humanities. Over the years Gaidai has added classes in business, economics, the fine arts, and the social sciences.

With the exception of language classes, instruction is provided in English. Hence, even students without any background in Japanese studies can benefit from the academic program. Since most of the faculty members have had experience studying in the U.S., they are familiar with the intellectual give-and-take expected by American college students. Kansai Gaidai's Japanese students join these classes in order to prepare themselves for their own foreign study experiences.

Students can opt to live with a Japanese family or stay in a residence hall on the campus. For a variety of reasons I always recommend the homestay for our students. Living off campus in a neighborhood not only provides American students with a multi-textured view of Japanese society, but also promotes the enhancement of their language skills.

One of the Kansai Gaidai's greatest advantages is its location which is almost equidistant from Osaka and Kyoto. The old and the new are easily reached by day trips. The ancient capital of Nara is only a couple of hours away by train. There could hardly be a better locale for students interested in religion, history, and the arts. Osaka, Japan's second largest city, has long been recognized as the country's commercial heartland. Gaidai's various business classes take advantage of nearby manufacturing and sales centers.

Institutionally, Kansai Gaidai has embraced the study of other cultures as fundamental to its academic mission, thus allowing Gaidai's various exchange relationships to flourish. This program continues to be strong because its leadership functions are at the very heart of the school's administrative structure. In my view it serves as an impressive model for programs with similar goals.

Kansai Gaidai is steadily adding new exchange agreements with American colleges, effectively bringing Japanese students to more and more campuses. While such agreements are necessarily tailor-made to the mutual needs

of the two institutions, there are typically two arrangements where the Japanese students are concerned— junior year abroad experience and “degree-seeking student.” The former is less complex since the Japanese students' goals are largely to improve their English and to take courses that will deepen their understanding of American life. A degree-seeking student expects to complete an American B.A. within a two-year period; much like a transfer student from a junior college. At times this arrangement requires some creative interpretation of a given student's previous work on the Gaidai campus in order to ensure that all prerequisites for upper level work have been satisfied and the student can indeed complete the degree within the mandated period of time. Such students return to the Japanese campus and take an additional term of work to complete their Gaidai degree. While this second model involves some administrative effort, having students on the campus for two rather than one year has clear advantages. They are more relaxed during the second year and far more likely to contribute to the general life of the campus in ways that enhance small Asian Studies programs. They also constitute a welcome addition to the American school's alumni base with all the benefits that can have over time.

In Furman's case we have found it advantageous to exchange people rather than money. Our students pay Furman tuition, room and board, while the Gaidai students pay their university's fees on their end. We then swap students, not cash. Although we work together to maintain a balance in the number of people exchanged, in reality Gaidai has been particularly good about matching the varying number of Furman recruits from year to year. Typically, Furman students go to Japan for the fall term only; periodically we have a student who wants to spend a full year at Gaidai.

Kansai Gaidai's program is open to students from schools that do not have an exchange agreement in place. Interested students simply need to refer to Gaidai's colorful website <www.kansaigaidai.ac.jp> and follow the instructions provided there.

One additional perk provided by the exchange agreement needs to be mentioned. American faculty members can arrange to live in Gaidai faculty housing for a term or a year in exchange for teaching a course each term during their residence. The new housing facilities are spacious and well appointed. Teaching responsibilities are normally limited to two days a week. This is a wonderful way to spend a sabbatical.