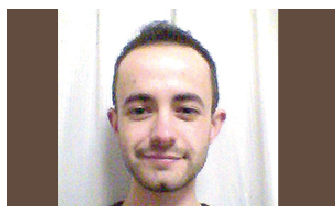


Voice of Students



Kit LAWRENCE

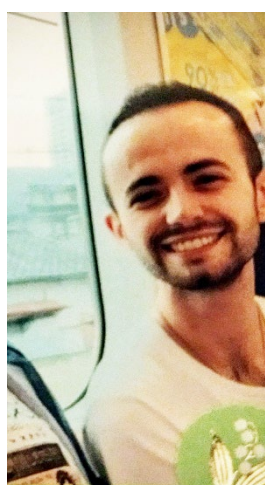
Manchester University, UK

Exchange period: September 2015 to August 2016

“In terms of the HGP program itself, its flexibility is a huge advantage. We were trusted to identify our own priorities and goals. ... This means that students can be honest with themselves about their abilities.”

My major is Japanese studies, so in my prior study in the UK, I had taken classes on Japanese society, education, religion, business, and culture before coming to Hitotsubashi. For this reason, I think that I had quite realistic expectations when I arrived in Japan; I had also spoken with other students who had studied here, which was a great way to prepare. I was able to look up the area geographically, and I had some recommendations of specific classes and tutors to look for.

I entered Hitotsubashi at the upper intermediate level, according to the placement test, and so most of my classes fell outside the HGP remit. In the first semester, though, I took some HGP courses, including one on the Japanese educational system from day care to university. As part of the course, we were able to visit private and public institutions, interact with and question the staff and teachers, and see in action the concepts we'd studied in class. The chance to talk directly with school staff, with the help of teachers to interpret, was invaluable for our own research, and we were all able to take away insights that we can use back home in our theses and dissertations. Another HGP course covered the history of early modern Japanese art, especially in relation to international cultural exchange, from a Japanese point of view. The chance to take these classes in English complemented my studies in Japanese and added variety to my studies and timetable.



In terms of the HGP program itself, its flexibility is a huge advantage. We were trusted to identify our own priorities and goals. Provided that we enrolled in and passed a minimum of 12 credits, we were given no restrictions on which classes we could take, and we could take more classes if we wished. This means that students can be honest with themselves about their abilities—and their weaknesses. It's possible to try out two equivalent classes at different levels, for example, if you feel unsure of which one suits your abilities better. You can study the areas and classes that you want to study, at the levels that are appropriate for you, and there's no requirement to take anything that doesn't work for you.

My study-abroad goals changed during my time in Japan. I can't state precisely how much my actual language level improved because I didn't take the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) while in Japan, but my comfort level and ability to handle myself in Japanese classes definitely increased. In my first semester, I took all the language courses at my level, as well as two HGP culture courses taught in English; although they were interesting, I felt that I wanted to use more Japanese in my second semester. The exchange student agreements

gave me the freedom to take any course that would accept me, and they didn't lock me into studying a certain number of credits in language. Therefore, in the second semester, I took three seminars aimed at regular Japanese students. All three were taught in Japanese but partially or completely used English-language reading material, which made them accessible for someone whose language skill was at an intermediate to advanced level, with a workload that wasn't too overwhelming. My experiences up to this point were an excellent preparation for doing this, and in view of my level at the time, this was absolutely the right choice for me. I would encourage incoming exchange students to take courses above your level and try things that you don't think you can do. You get only one chance to study abroad, so challenge yourself!