

Preparation for Life

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The Japanese have an old saying which, when translated into English, goes something like this: "If you give a man a fish you feed him for a day; if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." The International Students Center of Kagoshima University operates pretty much along the philosophy of this Japanese saying. It is here to help international students in any way possible.

Many universities in Japan or other countries do not have International Students Center or even counseling services. Therefore, many international students are not aware of the great help that the Counseling Center of Kagoshima University can give them. The purpose of the Counseling Center is to help students deal with any type of personal or academic problem. The staff of the International Students Center consists of professional counselors with backgrounds in psychology and higher education. Each staff person is trained to help students look at their problems in ways which allow them to clarify their thoughts and feelings, investigate alternatives, and decide on a plan of action. The counselors are also good at helping students who feel depressed, who feel that they are not establishing satisfying relationships with other people, who feel alone or alienated, or who are just generally unhappy and can't figure out why. The term "counseling" refers to a very personal relationship with a professional person who has been trained to help people deal with their problems. Aptitude, interest, or personality tests may be offered as part of this problem-dealing process.

Commonly for an international student to go through stages of adjustment while attending Kagoshima University. Many students arrive in Japan exhausted. The stress of preparing forms and applications, awaiting permissions, making financial plans, and leaving home and family behind for an indefinite period has probably meant several months of concentrated effort. Add to that a long international flight, jet lag, and the strain of speaking and listening in Japanese, ever fearful of misunderstanding, and it can be understood that students frequently need several days to rest, observe, and listen. After arrival in Japan, the student's pattern of adjustment to Japanese society may go through five stages:

Arrival fascination: The student who has recovered from his initial exhaustion is soon very busy

with registration, interviews, orientation to the campus, tours, parties, and getting acquainted with people in his immediate surroundings. He is caught up in the excitement of the experience and is beginning to find his place on campus and in the community.

Culture shock: Following immediately on the heels of the initial excitement is the frustration with college bureaucracy and the weariness of speaking and listening to Japanese every day. Sleep patterns may be disrupted; the student may suffer indigestion and be unable to eat; he may refuse to talk and protest at not being able to understand anyone. The student may sleep all day and watch TV instead of studying. Study habits may fail entirely.

Adjustment & Isolation: This phase occurs after few days (or few weeks) of culture shock when the student can understand lectures and textbooks somewhat better and has passed one or two tests or seminars. He makes a few friends and learns to manage the size and complexity of the campus. The student may then isolate himself and devote full time to studies, ignoring areas of life that are difficult. Sometimes problems with the Japanese language tend to isolate the student further and he may cling to a friend (or friends) who speaks the same native language. At either the culture shock or adjustment and isolation stage, the student may become very critical of all things Japanese. Japanese may find it difficult to communicate with him.

Adjustment & Acceptance: This is realized when the student finally feels at ease with the college and with peer groups and can handle the language well. Then he will be anxious to learn more about Japanese society and the significance of daily events, and he will want to travel around the country. He will be better able to handle with understanding any differences with friends; relations with Japanese can deepen and mature.

Return anxiety: As the student nears completion of his studies and return home draws closer, anxieties begin to intrude. It is difficult to leave new friends, a safe and familiar environment, and comfortable patterns of living. The student may realize how much he has changed since leaving home and wonder if it is possible to fit in again. This feeling may be compounded if the student is aware of changes in his own country and culture which have occurred during his stay here.

It is normal for an international student to go through these five stages while attending Kagoshima University. Just being aware that these kinds of feelings will occur may help to make

the adjustment less difficult.

For International Students generally in Japan and particularly at Kagoshima University understanding of the Japanese society is an important element in their adjustment and success in achieving their goals. Three important aspects of Japanese society that may be new to you but necessary to understand are:

Team Work & Uniformity: Japanese value dependence and working in groups led by a group leader and they generally believe that the ideal person is who fit into the group order. They often dislike being independent (individualism).

Concept of Time: In Japan, it is the custom to appear at the exact time set for an appointment or a social engagement. For instance, if you are invited to a dinner at 6:30 p.m., the host expect you to arrive at that time. When you are late, your hosts may be annoyed. Punctuality is very important. For many other social events, such as large informal parties, time is more flexible. Many Japanese organize their activities according to a schedule. As a result, they always seem to be running around, hurrying to get to their next "appointment." This fast pace of life may be overwhelming for many people from other cultures.

Friendship: Japanese students hesitant to talk. This is not an automatic commitment to enmity. In this mobile society where Japanese are taught to be formal, friendships are often transitory. Many Japanese have "friends at work," "friends at school," but only a few very close friendships. These friendships are usually the result of repeated interactions between individuals who find they share similar views and a variety of experiences together. This is not meant to discourage international students from attempting to establish friendships with Japanese. Most Japanese readily accept new people into their social groups. One of the best ways to meet Japanese is to go to sporting events and to join a special interest group on campus.

Success starts with you and the decision to study in another country is an exciting one. We hope you will find that Kagoshima University (Japan) can provide you with a unique learning experience, one that will give you the foundation to successfully achieve your educational and career goals.