

After winning the Pacific Northwest Japan Bowl, my teammate and I were able to go to Japan through the Kakehashi Project, which is a part of the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE). The Kakehashi Project worked hard to ensure we had a safe, enriching, and enjoyable trip. We were able to experience a variety of cultural activities, visit many important landmarks, and meet very important people.

Although we did many things on the trip, one of the most memorable was meeting distinguished people. The Kakehashi Project made sure to include “courtesy calls” on the trip, which entailed meeting and speaking with important guests. We attended many courtesy calls and were able to learn more about Japan and the culture through each. One of the courtesy calls we took part in was with the First Lady of Japan, Mrs. Yuko Kishida. It was amazing getting to speak with her. She shared many things about her life, professional and personal. We also got the chance to go to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and meet Mr. Rahm Emanuel, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan. Speaking with him was eye-opening, and it encouraged me to continue my studies of Japan.

Aside from formal endeavors, during the trip we were able to engage in many cultural activities. One of the first things we did in Japan was visit the Miyamoto-Unosuke Drum Museum in Tokyo. At the museum, we saw many types of drums from around the world, as well as learned a lot about taiko. We even got to practice taiko and work with an instructor! Personally, I am very interested in taiko, so I thought this activity was a lot of fun. Later in the trip, we visited a tatami-beri factory and shop. We took a tour of the factory and saw the effort and care put into every tatami-beri. We also got to make our own tatami and choose which tatami-beri to apply. Near the end of our trip, we visited a Japanese high school. We got to meet many students who attended the Okayama Prefectural Kurashiki Amaki Senior High School. We had a great time with students from the school. It was wonderful to connect with and make friends with the Japanese students, and it showed that cultural differences don’t need to be barriers to friendship.

Going to Japan through the Kakehashi Project was an experience that I will never forget. I am grateful that I had the chance to go and learn more about Japan. Going to Japan has inspired me to further my understanding of the Japanese language, culture, and people, in order to promote connections between the U.S. and Japan. I am very thankful towards everyone at JICE, JASWDC, JASO, and everyone involved in the Pacific Northwest Japan Bowl for providing me with such an incredible opportunity.