

Hokkai-Gakuen University Student Exchange From an Exchange Student's Point-of-View

北海学園大学交換留学 交換留学生の観点からすると

ようこそ！ Welcome!

This is written to tell potential exchange participants about the benefits of participation and how to prepare for the eight-month Hokkai-Gakuen University Student Exchange. The exchange will offer you a great opportunity to learn about Japan, its culture and language, and along the way, to learn a lot about yourself.

- ❖ My name is Amanda and I participated in this exchange from April to December, 2006. I would have to say that it was the greatest experience I could ever have wished for. I am a fourth year U of L student with a major in Art and I took Japanese 1000, 1100, 1500 and 2000 prior to going on the exchange. In the summer of 2005 I was able to participate on the one-month summer student exchange to Japan, visiting Hokkai-Gakuen University with 15 other U of L students. If you don't know about the summer exchange program [Click Here](#) to visit their web page. That great experience gave me the confidence to apply and succeed in this eight-month long exchange to Hokkai-Gakuen.
- ❖ In presenting this basic overview of the exchange, we must keep in mind that each person's experience is unique. My experience at Hokkai Gakuen may be very different from yours because our goals, needs and wants for this exchange may be different and circumstances in Sapporo may change. Nevertheless, I hope you will gain a basic overview of what can happen on this exchange based on my experience.

はじめに

To get yourself started I recommend that you look at Hokkai-Gakuen's English web page; it presents you with information about the University and its faculties. Also, get acquainted with Sapporo (札幌), the city where Hokkai-Gakuen is located.

[Visit the Hokkai-Gakuen Web page](#)
[Visit the City of Sapporo Web page](#)



Academic Requirements

- ❖ **Be sure to discuss your plans with your faculty program advisor.**
- ❖ Residence Requirements are specified in the Academic Regulations, Policies and Program Requirements section of the U of L Calendar.
- ❖ U of L's International Center for Students will give you lots of support during the application process. Keep in mind that you will need a student visa. The International Center will assist you with the forms, but you will have to apply for this Visa **THREE** months before you leave and you must have your Flight and travel details sorted before applying for the visa.
- ❖ There was no fee when I applied for the

Visa, but I did have to go to Calgary in order to apply at the Consulate-General of Japan.

- ❖ Your Student Visa will require you take 10 hours of class time per week, which amounts to **seven** Hokkai-Gakuen classes. Please see the [Classes](#) section below for further explanation on Classes at Hokkai-Gakuen.
- ❖ Hokkai-Gakuen will ask for you to have Travel or some kind of Health Insurance before coming and during your time in Japan and is valid in Japan. You will find out about this request during the application process but make sure you do what is required to meet this request.

日本語/Japanese Language

- ❖ Your understanding of the Japanese language is a **BIG** part of this exchange. You should have a minimum of Japanese 2000 from the U of L.
- ❖ Japanese 2000 will give you a good base for studying at Hokkai-Gakuen, but higher level classes or more Japanese studying on your own will allow you an even better opportunity to take more from your experience at Hokkai-Gakuen.
- ❖ A good thing to consider having is a Japanese – English Electronic Dictionary. Sadly these are not sold in Canada but can be easily bought in Japan. The one thing to be aware of is that these Dictionaries are made for



Figure 2:
Night out
with
classmates
for year-
end party

Japanese people wanting to translate between English and Japanese. When I bought mine in Sapporo, which is a Canon Wordtank V80, I did a lot of research on the Internet to find the perfect one for my needs. The key features to look for in an electronic dictionary are ones that offer a convenient way to look up Kanji you cannot read. The one I bought allows me to write kanji on the screen to look up Kanji I could not read. A good web page to help get you started is the Electronic Dictionaries section in a site called The Japan Shop. [Click here to visit](#). This site offers comparisons and great advice on what kind of dictionary to buy for a person's different level of Japanese. You can also e-mail the owner of the site for advice on what to buy if the site does not specify anything to your needs. I actually e-mailed and got a great deal of good advice, which led me to buying the dictionary I have.

授業/Classes

Figure 3:
Picture of
Hokkai-
Gakuen
Campus
Entrance



Culture and Japanese Film study.

- ❖ Depending on whether your class is taught in a lecture or seminar style and the teacher's style will determine how passive or active your classroom activities will be. My JSL classes were my most active classes with discussions, videos and group activities during class.
- ❖ All classes that you take at Hokkai-Gakuen are taught in Japanese.
- ❖ JSL classes are only for exchange students attending Hokkai-Gakuen, so the common language in the classroom is Japanese, as many of the other exchange students may not speak English. But being in these JSL classes presents a great opportunity to meet the other exchange students at Hokkai-Gakuen.
- ❖ Classes are offered at day and at night. Each class runs once a week for 90 minutes. So that would be 10.5 hours of class contact **per week** for 7 classes.

- ❖ The majority of your classes at Hokkai-Gakuen will be JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) classes but you will also have the opportunity to take other classes that Hokkai-Gakuen offers as well.
- ❖ Examples of some of the classes I took, besides JSL, at Hokkai-Gakuen were Phonetics, Japanese



Figure 4:
Teacher and
Classmates
from Seminar
class

- ❖ Year-long classes are worth 4 credits (2 credits per semester) and one-semester classes are worth 2 credits at Hokkai Gakuen.

Figure 5: JSL Class Group Picture



- ❖ All my classes for both semesters were between 9:00am – 5:30pm but night classes or Saturday classes are a possibility.
- ❖ The semesters at Hokkai-Gakuen **DO NOT** start and end at the same time as the U of L. You will have to make arrangements with your Professors at the U of L to leave early in April and

at Hokkai-Gakuen to leave late in December, before final examinations are held.

- ❖ Hokkai-Gakuen Semester I begins in the first week of April and near the end of July the semester will end. From the end of July till mid September you have summer vacation. After that Semester II starts in mid September till mid February but during this semester there is a short winter break, which runs from December 23 till the second week in January.

生活/Living

❖ Apartment/アパート

- Hokkai-Gakuen will help you as much as they can in regards to living in Sapporo.



Figure 6: My Apartment Building

- They will find an apartment close to the school for you to rent. The apartment I lived in was about a 15-minute walk to the school. I had two grocery stores near my apartment. Both were close enough that it was not a problem to carry groceries home.
- Your rent, as Hokkai Gakuen quoted me before they found

me an apartment, could be between 20000yen to 50000yen (in Canadian currency around \$200.00 to \$500.00). Hokkai-Gakuen will try to subsidize your rent.

- Hokkai-Gakuen will also supply you with **basic** apartment furnishings. I had a bed, sheets, bedding, basic cooking and cleaning supplies, washing machine, detergent, desk, refrigerator, microwave, toaster oven, TV and a small table.

- My apartment was owned and managed by a company called Leopalace21 (レオパレス21) in Japan. [Click Here](#) to check out their English web page or [Click Here](#) for their Japanese page to find more out about their apartments.



Figure 7: Spring view from my apartment window

❖ Subway/地下鉄

- There are a variety of passes for riding the subway.
- The pass that I used and found to be the best deal was the "With You" Card (共通ウィズユーカード).
- When you buy one of these cards at the ticket machines it comes in denominations of 1100yen (you only pay 1000yen to get this card), 3300yen (you pay 3000yen), 5500yen (you pay 5000yen) and 11500yen (you pay 10000yen).
- [Click Here](#) to visit the Sapporo Municipal Subway Web page (Japanese Only) or [Click Here](#) to visit the Wikipedia Sapporo Municipal Subway Web page.

Figure 8: Gakuen-Mae Subway



楽しい/Fun

- ❖ There is a lot to do in Sapporo, Hokkaido and at Hokkai Gakuen for Fun.
- ❖ The Hokkai Gakuen students have many clubs, ranging from Tennis to Judo and Tea Ceremony. If you find a club that interests you at Hokkai Gakuen talk to someone in the student services and they will help you in participating in your club of interest.
- ❖ Also the International Students themselves also have a club. They offer a range of social activities for exchange students to do while



Figure 9: One of the many Flowerbeds at Furano



studying at Hokkai Gakuen. Some activities we did were a year-end trip to a Japanese hot spring (温泉), flower viewing (花見), two one-day bus trips outside of Sapporo and much more.

- ❖ Also Hokkaido Railway (JR Hokkaido) offers many JR passes that you can buy to visit places outside of Sapporo. Take a look around their web page to see what they offer. [Visit The JR Hokkaido Web page](#)

お友だち/Friends

- ❖ Your friends and classmates will become a big part of your life during your exchange, and these wonderful people you will meet will forever change you. You will not only be meeting Hokkai-Gakuen students but other International exchange students, so you will not only be able to learn about Japan but about the other International students' countries too.
- ❖ Because of the great friends I made at Hokkai-Gakuen I was able to learn so much from them and I was also able to teach many of my friends about Canada, too.
- ❖ It is also because of my friends at Hokkai-Gakuen that I never once felt homesick, out of place or unwelcome during my exchange. We all together created a family where we supported each other in everything we did, learned or struggled with during our exchange. The people you meet and befriend during your exchange will become very dear friends to you, whom you will never forget.

アドバイス/Advice

❖ 荷造り/Packing

- Pack about 2 weeks worth of clothing, you can do laundry so you don't need a month worth of clothing.
- Most homes in Japan **DO NOT** have dryers so you will have to hang dry your clothing. But with the humidity your clothing will take roughly half a day to dry.
- **Keep in Mind** Sapporo does get winter and at times can be a bit cold, but the summer is nice and warm!!
- Sapporo gets all four seasons just like Canada, but the winter is not as cold and the summer is much hotter and more humid than we are accustomed to in Alberta. So consider packing clothing for all types of weather, from -15°C in the winter (The coldest I experienced during the winter) to $+30^{\circ}\text{C}$ in the summer.



Figure 11:
Winter
view of
Sapporo
from my
apartment
window

- At least one dressy outfit for formal occasions will be handy to have but in general the style of clothing worn by Canadian students fits well in Japan. Just be aware of what other Japanese students are wearing and are not wearing to school and you will be able to know what is appropriate and what is not.

❖ お金/Money

- It comes down to **you** on how much money you want to bring (KEEP RENT IN MIND). I budgeted myself at \$400 CAD a month to pay for groceries, transportation, school supplies, entertainment and all my daily living expenses. I kept my rent and spending money separate. But you may have your own preference on budgeting.
- My budget of \$400 CAD PLUS rent of \$200 CAD EQUALS a total of \$600 per month for the nine months I was there. I was sometimes under budget and rarely did I have to go over my budget. However, someone with more lavish entertainment and alcohol preferences could spend much more than I did.
- Japan is still very much a **CASH** country. You can take money out at the Post Office ATM. They are pretty much the only place that will accept Foreign Bank Cards. Check with your bank on Service Fees.
- There is an ATM located in Hokkai-Gakuen on your way down to the subway. If you have trouble finding it, ask anyone at Hokkai-Gakuen and they will be more than willing to help!!

Frequently Asked Questions

❖ **Did you get credit at U of L for your Hokkai-Gakuen classes?**

- I was not able to get credit for my studies at Hokkai-Gakuen because of the regulations of the Residency Requirement. But because there are many willing instructors at the U of L, I was able to do an Independent Study with a previous instructor in order to receive academic credit while at Hokkai-Gakuen.

❖ **How hard did you work for classes?**

- I worked very hard at Hokkai-Gakuen, but for me it never felt like "very hard" as I enjoy greatly studying the Japanese language and culture. But depending on your level of Japanese and what classes you take you should expect about 2 - 3 hours of homework for every 90 minutes of class time. In total I had 10.5 hours of classes per week and about twenty to thirty hours of study and preparation leaving lots of time for social and leisure time pursuits.

❖ **Where did you pay tuition?**

- I paid tuition at the U of L. During your application process, the International Center for Students along with the Cash Office will help to determine the price of your tuition. My tuition was the cost of 4 U of L classes for the full duration of the exchange.

❖ **Was there an English speaker available if you got into trouble?**

- Yes, of course! Hokkai-Gakuen has many staff and faculty members that speak English; some are even from Canada and the U.S.A. and they are more than willing to lend a helping hand whenever you are in trouble or in need of some home culture.

❖ **What clothes do typical students wear to class?**

- Students wear the same type of clothes that we do to class. There is no strict dress code or uniform that you have to wear. Just use your common sense when deciding what to wear to class and anywhere else you may go.

❖ **Were did you access your e-mail and Internet?**

- Hokkai-Gakuen, like the U of L, has computer labs for you to use. You can surf the Internet, check e-mail and work on homework at the labs. Just make sure you check the lab times, as some labs will have classes booked. There is a time schedule posted in the labs.

❖ **Did you bring a computer with you?**

- I did, but I rarely used it or needed it as I had access to computer labs at Hokkai-Gakuen.

Final Words

Be open-minded! Try everything that comes your way, you never know it could be the greatest thing you ever do. Or you may just regret not doing it in the end. Try to learn and find the good in a bad experience. You will get nothing from this exchange if you think negatively about what you experience. **AND...**

HAVE FUN!! O(^ ▽ ^)b