

My name is John Cavoulas, I'm a 2021 graduate with a B.A. in Communication and a minor in Japanese Studies.

Japanese language has always been a passion of mine. From a young age, I was interested in Japanese pop culture in the forms of video games, music, books, and TV. As I grew older, I became interested in learning more about the culture behind these interests. Thus, I began studying Japanese in my free time, which led me to taking Japanese classes as a community college student.

I never planned on using my Japanese for professional purposes, for me it was just a hobby. However, despite not being fluent in the language, my study of Japanese has helped my academic and professional advancement many times. One of the first times this occurred was near the end of my time in community college, when I was trying to figure out what four-year school to transfer to. At the time, I was working at the Apple Store, and a customer I was helping made a comment about how the Apple Homepod would be better if it had an anime girl hologram inside it. Naturally, I informed her that this exact product already exists (called Gatebox, if you're interested), and we began a discussion about our shared interest in Japanese culture. This customer was Dr. Christena Turner, and she told me about the wonderful Japanese Studies program at UCSD. At the time, I had no idea that UCSD had a Japanese Studies program, or that I would even qualify to transfer to a UC. Thanks to this discussion with Dr. Turner, I was enrolling at UCSD the following Fall quarter. It's this reason why I tell people that Japanese Studies is the reason I got into UCSD: without that conversation from a shared interest in Japanese Studies, I might have never known UCSD was an option for me.

The Japanese Studies program at UCSD greatly helped me to continue learning the language at a time when I began to plateau in my self-study. The lectures and discussions at the JAPN 20 level were taught essentially all in Japanese, which greatly helped to increase my speaking and listening comprehension. I also appreciated the extracurricular opportunities the department promoted, such as the weekly Japanese weekly book club meetings, and language conversation tables.

Even to this day, my experience in the Japanese Studies program helps my professional networking. I can't count the number of times when I've been at a work function or professional networking event, and I've had the chance to mention that I minored in Japanese Studies. Someone else at the event always chimes in saying "Oh my gosh, so did I!", and the conversation goes from there. I have used this strategy to build longstanding, professional relationships with colleagues and peers, which only resulted from that shared experience in a Japanese Studies program. The fact that I'm taking part in this alumni panel is a perfect example of this phenomena!

I might not be able to understand Japanese as well as I did during my time in the program, but just having that experience has been an invaluable tool for me to relate to others, whom I would have had no other connection with. Therefore, I highly recommend taking part in our Japanese Studies program. Not just for learning Japanese from a great group of instructors who care about your success, but also because having that experience will continue to help your personal and professional growth in the most unexpected ways.