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B.A. in Sociology – Social Inequality

Minors in Japanese Studies and Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Student experiences as a Japanese Studies minor and a student-athlete

Coming into college, I didn't know what I wanted to major in, but I knew I wanted to enroll in Japanese, since I had never been able to formally study it after I lost the ability to read and write once I started school as a child. I will always remember how much I felt at home after taking JAPN10A with Honma sensei my very first quarter of college. After that, minoring in Japanese was a no brainer knowing that I was going to take at least three quarters of Japanese. I was especially grateful for how supportive my Japanese professors were of my swim commitments and how accommodating they were of my training and competition schedule.

I also was fortunate to have been able to take Japanese alongside some of my teammates and fellow student-athletes. My absolute favorite JAPN series was JAPN135 with Iwamoto sensei. Not only did I have the opportunity to practice writing, conversing, presenting, and collaborating in Japanese, but I also enjoyed the changing course themes each quarter. (Also, having the class twice a week instead of five times also worked well with my academic and training schedule.)

Honors project with Prof. Turner

My sophomore year, I took a Sociology methods class with Professor Turner for a major requirement. That turned out to be the best decision I've ever made because it introduced me to Professor Turner and sociological research as a whole. My junior year, I participated in the sociology department's two-quarter-long honors program, developing a research project on a topic of my choice. I chose my thesis to be about mixed Japanese family, identity, and belonging, something that was both personally and academically meaningful.

Having completed the program, I would recommend it to any current student as an opportunity to work closely with a professor or faculty member. The experience was valuable not only academically, but also professionally, as it allowed me to develop my research and presentation skills, build connections, and see how my work could be applied outside of the university.

Not only did Professor Turner help guide the success of my final paper, she really encouraged me along the way. I had never thought of myself as an “academic” or someone eligible for graduate school until meeting her. In addition, the program being in seminar style also gave me a glimpse of what graduate school is like. I really enjoyed working with my peers, getting their feedback, and seeing their own research develop. Once I completed my thesis, I was able to present it at the undergraduate research conference on campus which helped me work on my presentation skills.

Another opportunity that came out of my thesis was a connection I made with the San Diego JACL. I initially reached out to the organization to ask about financial support for an upcoming

conference. The president later told me that, although the board was hesitant at first, someone had clicked on my LinkedIn, seen my thesis research, and suggested that I present my work to the chapter in exchange for an honorarium. It was a meaningful example of how the research I conducted through my thesis created opportunities beyond UCSD.

JASC application and participation experiences

I had the privilege of participating in the Japan America Student Conference (JASC) this summer as an American Delegate. This year, it was held in three American sites: San Francisco, Nashville, and Washington, DC. I visited city halls, company headquarters, manufacturing sites, universities, nonprofits, think tanks, and government agencies. I met and talked to ambassadors, professors, professionals, engineers, politicians, and students.

Alongside the programming, I completed a research project with my roundtable, Civil, where we explored issues surrounding identity, community, and polarization. Our final presentation was incredibly rewarding because it brought together our late-night discussions, notes from field trips, and individual research into one final project that reflected the work we had developed together throughout the conference. And more importantly, beyond the research itself, my roundtable mates became lifelong friends.

JASC isn't just for future diplomats or government leaders; it's for anyone who wants to strengthen their collaboration, communication, research, and networking skills while contributing to the U.S.-Japan relationship. The conference brings together people from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds, making it a valuable experience for anyone interested in building relationships, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and working collaboratively across different perspectives.

Since JASC is a student-led conference, after participating as a delegate, you have the option to run for the executive committee (EC) and participate in the following year's conference as organizers. Keep in mind that this conference alternates between being hosted in Japan and America; this upcoming year will be in Japan! I highly highly highly encourage anybody who has the slightest interest to apply.

Future goals

As for my professional goals, I am looking to pursue a career in social work. I am interested in working in America and Japan with individuals of mixed heritage and in the non-profit sphere supporting mental health and well-being. Another goal of mine, which is more personal, is to live in Japan for an extended period of time! I think it would be a worthy personal challenge, an exploration of my family and identity, and an opportunity for self-growth.

Message for the current students

Take any and every opportunity you can! Once you graduate, you're either going to be applying for jobs or graduate school that are going to be asking you for different types of experience and you'll want a variety to draw from. Also, sign up for classes you think are too hard, or you're underqualified for because you'll end up surprising yourself. But also, at the end of the day,

don't worry too much about academics and focus more on your experience. This could mean making friends with your classmates or joining different student organizations.

One highlight of my college experience was studying abroad in Tokyo, especially since I took Japanese classes that prepared me for the experiences I had, like taking the train, ordering food, and checking out at the konbini.

I also recommend connecting with UCSD graduate students to learn more about current and emerging research in your field. It is also a great way to gain insight into graduate student life and determine whether pursuing graduate school is the right path for you.

Something that I wish I did more was networking. As an introvert, I avoided career fairs and attending campus events but I later learned later that “cosplaying” an extrovert is extremely beneficial in that you're able to meet more people and get more opportunities this way. So, go to career fairs and get LinkedIn! Lastly, don't limit yourself to events and organizations at UCSD, there are so many in the greater San Diego area that are either in search or in need of young perspectives.