

My name is Derek, and I was a Computer Science major, Japanese Studies and Math double minor that graduated in Winter 2021. I've been working as a Software Engineer at Google for 3 and a half years. Like a lot of people, I was drawn to studying Japanese by Japanese pop culture. Although I wasn't very big into watching anime, I was primarily drawn to Japanese video games and Japanese music.

My studies in Japanese did not begin at UCSD; I was lucky enough to attend a high school that offered Japanese as a foreign language. Thus, before entering UCSD I had studied Japanese for 4 years. When I entered UCSD, I initially decided to continue studying Japanese with no intention of major or minor. I took Japanese 20, 130, 135, 140, 150... By the time I began taking the 140 series I was close to completing a Japanese Studies minor anyway, and thus I declared a Japanese Studies minor.

Even though my diploma says that I'm a Computer Science major, I am a Japanese Studies student by heart. In the Japanese Studies department, those who are passionate about studying Japanese will be with you until the end. Through studying Japanese at UCSD, I made a handful of friends I still talk to today. (One of my best friends was also a CS major, but we actually met through being in the same 20A tutorial section together. We took more Japanese classes together than CS classes.)

My instructors were Ross-sensei (20A), Inada-sensei (20B), Sato-sensei (20C, 130, 140), Takeda-sensei (135), and Mochizuki-sensei (150C). The interesting stuff all happened in the upper division courses: We talked about societal issues, history, current events, just to name a few. The things I talked about during class occasionally come up when I visit Japan and talk to other Japanese people!

As far as assignments go, I will never forget the handwritten letter exchange when I took Takeda-sensei's 135C class. I was the external coordinator for our community event, but my laptop broke mid-class so I was not able to write emails to the other person. Instead of writing emails, I wrote letters by hand, and Takeda-sensei took photos of the letters and sent them to the other person through LINE. Looking back, I regret not writing the letters vertically like a more traditional Showa-era letter, but I will never forget it. It was even mentioned in a book that Takeda-sensei contributed to!

My time studying Japanese gave me the tools to lead me to a growing social circle of like-minded Japanese friends, which in turn allowed me to have a greater appreciation towards Japanese culture. I have since visited more than 30 prefectures, eaten lots of local foods, and acted as a guide for friends and coworkers who visited Tokyo. I even learned a little bit of Miyagi-ben!

One of those friends is my current partner (who is from Miyagi but lives in Tokyo), who I now visit twice a year. To get closer to him, I've been looking at opportunities to transfer internally.

To the current students who are interested in Japanese: Make use of your resources, whether it be office hours, book club, or otherwise! Also, classes are great, but it is important to exercise what you learned outside of the classroom as well. If there is one facet of Japanese culture you're really interested in, hold onto it because who knows - it might lead to more things, which can open doors for you.