Konnichiwa!

St. Paul's School is just a year away from celebrating the 25th anniversary of our exchange with the Gakushuin School in Japan. This exchange has become one of our School's signature programs over the past quarter-century, and remains a source of pride for both institutions. Long before the recent buzz about the importance of a global education, St. Paul's School and Gakushuin saw the value in forming partnerships around the world. I have spent some time in the last few months reading about the roots of this exchange and share just of piece of this history below.

In 1989, then St. Paul's Trustee, Dr. William Durden visited Gakushuin on a trip to Japan and was impressed with the school. Shortly after his visit, the St. Paul's lacrosse team was invited to play in the first International Friendship Games in Japan. It appears that these two trips to Japan proved to be very positive and led to a formal visit to Gakushuin in 1990. It was on this trip that Headmaster Robert Hallett, accompanied by the late Bill Bassett and Mr. John Thorpe, established a formal faculty exchange between the two schools. By 1995 St. Paul's was offering Japanese as part of its K-12 modern language curriculum. Our nationally honored Japanese program now is one of the more popular language choices at the School.

In 2000, St. Paul's School expanded the exchange to include not only faculty but students as well, and that year SPS hosted two Gakushuin students for the academic year. Within the next few years St. Paul's students were attending classes in Japan. Today's exchange continues to include teachers and students with visits to both countries ranging from three weeks to a full year.

While many schools are now exploring international exchanges, St. Paul’s School is proud that we exhibit a longstanding commitment to exposing our faculty and students to different cultures and educational systems. Our programs have grown to include opportunities in Argentina, China, France, Germany, Scotland and Spain. We will also be offering a summer service learning trip to Kenya this year. The successful relationship that was forged between SPS and Gakushuin has paved the way for these other exchanges. It is clear that St. Paul’s School has long appreciated the importance of preparing our students for the global community in which they are members.

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This past November, I had the opportunity to travel to Yokohama Suiryo school with two SPSG students, Emily and Payton, a junior and a senior respectively. The experience opened my eyes to the depth and joy in friendship and learning possible through our sister (and brother) school relationships.

On this particular occasion, Suiryo had invited Payton, Emily, and I to attend and share a presentation of our twentieth anniversary of our partnership. The purpose of our partnership was to strengthen our mutual understanding between our citizens in order to strengthen the relationship between our nations.

The phrase "mutual understanding" does not do justice to the friendships we formed during the course of our visit. In fact, it felt in many ways like we were getting re-acquainted with old friends or relatives than encountering entirely new people. The white school buildings set atop a lush hilltop; the humid weather; and the fun, student-led assemblies, dance performances, and festival all reminded us immediately of home. As we toured the building on our first day, we recognized own Lila Lohr and Nancy Marbury, then Head of School and Upper School Head, upon their 1993 visit to formalize our partnership, smiling down on us from their frames on the walls of Suiryo's main gathering space.

Students rushed to greet Emily who had visited Suiryo this past summer and to meet Payton. There were hugs and squeals of glee akin to those one might hear on ring day or Puttin' on the Hits. Countless faculty members introduced themselves to me and shared fond recollections of time spent visiting with Lila, Nancy, and other SPSG faculty and staff members. On Festival Day, a Suiryo alum introduced herself to me as an SPSG alum – her trip to SPSG in the early 2000's had inspired her love of travel and American culture. An international banker, she modeled the same warmth, confidence, and poise we recognize in our own alums.

And yet, as much as there are strikingly similarities between our schools, so too were there new friendships and experiences that contributed tremendously to my new vision of the significance of the sister school relationship:

Joining us at Suiryo School for the sister school celebration were parallel trios from Shanghai School No.3 and Liceo Mexicano Japones. Both schools have equally long and multifaceted relationships with Suiryo, and Liceo Mexicano Japones is a sister school with whom we too share a relationship. Payton and Emily became fast friends with not only their Suiryo host sisters but also their sisters from Shanghai and Mexico City. Towards the end of the festival, we three teachers wandered around the dwindling festivities and then found our six girls and their Suiryo siblings sitting around a table in the common area, beat-boxing to an American song. The next day, we enjoyed one another's easy company while shopping in Yokohama and stopping in Yokohama's Chinatown for lunch.

After lunch, the girls went off with Erin, the cool, young Suiryo teacher, to continue shopping in a discount area, while we adults headed to the very upscale department store under Mrs. Tajima's expert care. Mrs. Tajima even helped me to select the perfect silk scarf for my mother's birthday – and it is no easy feat to please my mother!

On our final day, Mr. Asano, the director of Suiryo's International Program, traveled with us on the two-hour train ride to the airport. He bought us beautiful bento lunches which we relished as we knew we wouldn't see their like for some time to come. Payton, Emily, and Mr. Asano chatted easily about politics and the college process and career dreams along the way. In the airport, as we checked our luggage and grew sad about the impending good-bye, a young woman, a recent Suiryo alum who was working for the airline, ran up to hug Mr. Asano.

School everywhere is about new ideas, new friendships, and new horizons. In this, Suiryo was no different than SPSG, and yet somehow that I may only be able to explain years from now, the horizon Suiryo opened for us and for me was unspeakably vast and beautiful, lined with sheer clouds of possibility.

To read more about and check out photos from our November visit to Japan, check out the Japan Journals on my Tumblr http://janet-aha.tumblr.com/
First and second grade classes are benefited to have the Japanese exchange student once a week. Kazushi helps my Friday 2nd grade classes and Tsubasa helps my Wednesday 1st grade class. The students all love the high school boys and they are trying to interact with them.

Third and fourth grade classes enjoyed being “Chiisai Sensei (Little Teacher)” in January. We had St. Paul’s Plus students visit us and had a great opportunity to teach Japanese to the little ones. Everybody seemed to have a great time to interact with our little guests. I was very amazed to watch them how to teach Japanese. Yes, they are exactly a copy of me😊.

Additionally, I am very honored to receive the Teacher of the Year Award by AATJ (American Association of Teachers of Japanese)!! My students as well as their parents and faculty have been happy about this big news. My fourth grade student, Caeleigh Stamper said, “I was not surprised at the news!” Eamonn Christian said to his sister who asked him if taking Japanese is very hard, “Not so hard because I have the best Japanese teacher in the U.S.!!” All my students were very excited when I brought back my award plaque. I realized that I have been encouraged by those little supporters for many years. Promoting the Japanese program has been essential for me to acquire the number of the students every year. Although we have been targeting only my school with the promotion, the word has been spreading throughout our community now. I have heard many nice comments about our Japanese program from people outside of our school and this has surprised me. Year by year, we have more and more students taking Japanese at St. Paul’s.

This Kudos has been achieved not only by me but also by the other three divisions’ Japanese teachers. The ideas that I thought of for our program can’t become a reality without their support. Collaboration is one of the key ingredients for our success at our school. I would like to say thank you for their continuous support. I will keep devoting my life to promoting our Japanese program throughout our community and beyond.
I have been in the Lower School Japanese program for 6 years and I am in fourth grade. Japanese is my favorite class because my classmates and I get to learn a new language that not a lot of people get to learn. In our Japanese class, we get first do an introduction. Then we learn a new letter in the hiragana alphabet and write down the word that starts with that letter. Next, we learn new words in the category we are studying. After that we play a review game. We play all different kinds of games. My favorite game is when our teacher, Sensei, says the words we have been studying and we close our eyes and show the signs for the words. If one of us does the wrong sign, she is out.

Japanese is not that challenging for me but it is hard remembering the grammar and pronunciation. I think the Lower School Japanese program will benefit me a lot when I get older because then I will be able to go to Japan and speak the language and write so that people will understand me. It is really cool to be able to speak a different language that a majority of people don’t speak in America. Japanese is the best class ever because I have a great teacher and great materials. Other people should take Sensei’s Japanese class to challenge themselves. It would be really exciting to go on the exchange program to Japan when I get older. I would be able to show off everything the Japanese teachers taught me and how hard I worked. I love to talk to people in Japanese and have a conversation. The Japanese culture really interests me because it has really unique customs that our different from other cultures. I hope a lot of people will join the Lower School Japanese program in the future because it’s a great class.
My name is Caeleigh Stamper and I am a student at St. Paul’s Lower School. Not a lot of American children have the chance to take Japanese classes, but I am a lucky student for the opportunity to learn this interesting language. In my Japanese class, we learn one of the three alphabets, we make stories, we act out skits, and we play educational games. My favorite game is when our teacher, Sensei, tells us a story in Japanese and we have to translate it to English. Our usual homework is to study the vocabulary, but sometimes we make things such as flashcards related to what we’re learning in class. Our teacher is very kind, and she makes sure we study so we can understand and remember the words.

We meet three times a week, and at the beginning of each class we say the weather, date, day of the week, and we count in Japanese. Since I am in fourth grade, my class counts by tens (10-100), but students in a younger grade count from one to ten. At the end of each year, every student gets to make and eat their own rice ball. I love adding seaweed and seasoning to mine. Also, each student gets a stamp sheet. Students can earn a stamp by winning a game, or bringing in homework on time, or completing other fun assignments. After a student earns ten stamps, he or she will get a trading card with a photo of a St. Paul’s teacher wearing a funny outfit or standing next to something silly. I love getting a teacher to sign my trading cards!

I had my own funny experience with a radio station, not too long ago. I called to request a song and when the man asked what I was doing at the time, my answer was “My Japanese homework!” When he asked my age (I was nine at the time), he was impressed and asked me to say something in Japanese. I counted to ten and when I was finished, I had earned a prize! Even before that experience, I loved learning this language and I can’t wait to learn more!
This year we welcomed lovely thirteen fifth grade girls and four sixth grade girls into the Middle School Japanese program. They bring a lot of energy, great excitement, interest to class, and they nurture each other by fostering a learning community, which is truly appreciated. The fifth and sixth graders have been supportive of one another; yet they never forget to win in the competition in class. The seventh and eighth grade girls have been pleasing me with their hard work by communicating in Japanese. They had a presentation about their family, which was terrific. I enjoy learning about their lives in Japanese. I am also pleased to teach Upper School Japanese 2 this year. This group of young adults has a great sense of humor in Japanese. They come in class saying “konnichiwa” with a positive tone. I also enjoy the Japanese conversation with each of them every day, and I love seeing their curiosity about the third Japanese alphabet called Kanji.

This past year, I was able to take six wonderful girls from our program: Emily Dickson, Kaitlin Gleason, Virginia Pellington, Maddy Perry, Makeda Petiri, and Corinna Vlahoyiannis. It was my pleasure to see the ladies explore the language and culture on the opposite side of the earth and have a great time with Japanese students at our sister school, *Yokohama Suiryo Junior and Senior High School*. I also enjoyed hearing the host sisters’ experiences with the Japanese exchange students last spring. The Japanese girls had such a wonderful time in the United States, thanks to the ladies and their families who opened the doors and warmly welcomed them into their houses. I feel very fortunate to have such wonderful families and to see the nurturing of lasting friendship. I hope that these ladies will be real-world connectors between the U.S. and Japan in the future.

This year Suiryo graciously invited our faculty and girls to Japan to celebrate the memorial 20th year relationship with us. Marking the stage of our long relationship surely leads us to flourish our partnership and positively affect our community in the future.

I would also like to congratulate the Upper School girls who took the Japanese national exams. Thanks to their hard work, our program obviously stays beyond national level.
Being a part of the Japanese program has been one of the many great experiences offered to me at SPSG. I began learning Japanese while at the lower school in first grade, and have been captivated by the language and culture ever since. Both Ms. Kimura and Ms. Okamoto are excellent teachers who have supported me on my journey through learning the Japanese language. My main goal is to become fluent in Japanese so that when I visit Japan in the future I will be fully prepared to converse with all the people I meet.

My Japanese class is always filled with excitement. The class usually starts with a warm-up that covers previously learned vocabulary or grammar. Then we work on learning new vocabulary and play games that help us remember new material. We also use pictures and note-cards to study for upcoming assessments. Ms. Okamoto encourages us to speak Japanese in and out of class. Japanese has been an influential part of my school life. I would like to encourage everyone to become part of this amazing program at SPSG.

When I decided to join the Japanese program at SPSG, I was very apprehensive at first. This was because I was worried about the language being very complicated and hard to learn. As I began to learn I came to the conclusion that it was going to be challenging, but it would be worth it. Now I am in the middle of third year learning Japanese and I am beginning to love the language. I not only learning to read, write, and speak the language, I am also learning so much about Japanese culture. In Japanese class every day we learn different vocabulary and grammar. In addition we learn about various Japanese traditions. For example we did a traditional Japanese character painting to symbolize what we want to in the New Year. Another aspect I like about the Japanese program is the exchange program. In the sixth grade I had the opportunity to host a Japanese student from our sister school in Japan. During the exchange program the students were able to go to New York and Washington DC. Also they got to experience the different classes at SPSG. For example, during Japanese class we get to talk to the exchange students in Japanese to help us practice our interacting skills. This was great experience because it was a first hand way to learn about the Japanese culture, and I plan to visit Japan in the near future. I hope that more people will be encouraged to step out of their comfort zone and challenge themselves by taking the Japanese language.
As always, the students have been working hard to gain a deeper understanding of the culture and work towards becoming fluent in the language. This year, I am honored to be able to teach two sections of sixth grade classes, one class with students who took it last year, and another section for new students. Both sections are working very hard. The new students learned the first character systems within a month and a half and dove into the textbook from day one. The more experienced students are working very hard to practice the language in various situations. I am so pleased to see that they are even able to joke around in the target language. The seventh graders continue to navigate the more challenging grammar points and learning several hundred words. They are getting ready to create their campus video tours in Japanese. The eighth graders are engaged in more challenging grammar points and are learning a lot of new kanji characters. I am pleased to see that they are able to integrate that into their writing. They also learned the informal forms, which allows them to learn more grammar points and differentiate their speaking based on who they are talking to. I have been able to integrate some functions of the iPod this year that the students seem to enjoy and benefit.

My Japanese 1 class in the Upper School amazes me each day. We cover an incredible amount of vocabulary and grammar each day. Mr. Stollenmeyer is also taking Japanese and has been doing a fantastic job practicing what he is learning with his Japanese sister-in-law. The other students are also trying to use Japanese each day in class and are fully engaged each day. I am amazed at how much they are able to speak and write.

Tsubasa and Kazushi have been a great asset to the school. Both made great contributions to the soccer teams in the fall, the squash team during the spring, and Kazushi has had a great start in golf and Tsubasa has been doing a great job managing the baseball team. I would also like to take the time to thank our two wonderful host families for Kazushi and Tsubasa. The Buterbaugh family has been hosting Kazushi for the entire school year. I have heard great things about the family and how devoted they are to having Kazushi have the best experience. The Thorpes have hosted numerous students and they always provide the students with a top notch experience. They have continued to give Tsubasa such a rich experience with care and genuine devotion.

I am also excited that Campbell Shelhos will be spending the next four months in Japan at our partner school, Gakushuin. I am confident that he will represent our school very well. I have known him for about ten years now and he has impressed me with his genuine love of learning and his heart of gold. We also have five excellent students going on our three-week program in June. I’m sure that Ben, Alexander, Jalen, Christian, and Andrew. I know they will take every opportunity to gain the most from the experience.

I am also very proud of our Lower School Japanese Teacher (plus our fifth grade Japanese teacher), Ms. Kaoru Kimura for being recognized by the American Association of Teachers of Japanese for the Japanese teacher of the year. It is very well deserved and we are all very proud of her.
My experience with Japanese has been great! I first took Japanese in Pre-First and instantly loved it. Kimura Sensei was my first Japanese teacher and made every lesson fun. She was my teacher from First Grade through Fifth Grade. I learned words and phrases, lessons about Japan and its culture, and the first two alphabets—hiragana and katakana.

Starting in Sixth Grade, I had a new teacher, Dr. Matsuzaki. He had enjoyable and competitive games that helped us learn our material and try to improve our fluency with the language. To help with our fluency, we were not allowed to speak any English in class. It may sound difficult, but it wasn’t that bad. You adapt to it and it comes to help you later on when speaking. Our class started every day with a warm-up to help retain information from the previous day. The warm-up contains sentences in English that we have to translate to Japanese.

My favorite days in class are those where we learn about Japan and try rice balls and other food. I hope to one day visit Japan.

As I said before, my experience with Japanese has been great and is only getting better!
We were able to conclude the 2012-2013 school year with many joyful accomplishments and fun! Ned Moreland and Connor Coleman successfully completed their time at our sister school, Gakushuin Senior High School in Tokyo, Japan, as a 3/-4-month exchange student. For the first time, we were able to Skype with the boys during our class! The boys were in their bedrooms at night in Japan while we were still in our first period class. It was one of those moments when the help of technology allowed us to be more connected. We hope to do the same when Campbell Shelhoss is in Japan this spring! I am also proud to share that the IB exam results for last year’s seniors were outstanding and their hard work truly deserves my standing applause. We also arranged to have our year-end sushi party at Chiyo Sushi and had a blast reminiscing with all the seniors, the Japanese teachers and exchange students in attendance.

The 2013-2014 school year started solidly. Our program has gotten so popular that we had to have two sections of Japanese II this year. I have the bigger group of 20 students which are a mix of seniors, sophomores and freshmen. Ms. Okamoto, SPSG Japanese teacher, has the rest in her class. It has been a pleasure working with her. We communicate regularly to match our paces, but trust each other. Thanks to her expertise in teaching, dedication, flexibility, and wonderful character, we have the best coordination! We are very lucky to have her on our team.

This year marks my 10th year of service at St. Paul’s School and my love for teaching and the SP community continues to grow stronger. Every single student whom I had the privilege of teaching has given me an opportunity to learn and grow to be a better teacher. Additionally, I have been extremely fortunate to be a part of the well-established Japanese program carefully crafted by nationally recognized outstanding Japanese educators, Dr. Matsuzaki and Ms. Kimura! Their generous guidance and leadership have been nothing but invaluable. Lastly, but not least, the support and love we receive from our parents are truly the back bone of the success of our Japanese program and we cannot thank you enough.
Julian Sensei has now been my teacher for two years and made the transition from Middle School to Upper School very easy. Although the material is always getting more challenging, Julian Sensei finds a way to “ease the pain.” One way that she does this is when she sets the mood immediately when you walk into the classroom every day. The mood is always positive and has a sense of eagerness to start the new topic of the day. She is also constantly looking for ways to help you improve your grade and completely understand the material at hand. Julian Sensei is fair to all students and treats everyone like they are her favorite. Even though my classmates and I have only been with her for two years, we all feel very comfortable around her and we know where to draw the line.

Julian Sensei does a great job at not only teaching us the language, but also introducing us to the culture. We often have interactive ways to do this, such as making rice balls or crafting origami. Another thing that Julian Sensei does to further familiarize us with the Japanese culture is showing us power points on various things. Some power points include things that are essential to Japanese people but are overlooked by other countries. We get to know all of the secrets that we would not normally learn because we are being taught from someone who is native from Japan. To me, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I am taking advantage of every aspect that I can. I am doing this to further indulge myself in the lifestyle of Japanese people, and the culture of Japan, and I would not have this opportunity without Julian Sensei and the Upper School Japanese program.

There is so much to love. There is so much to learn. Japan has it all ranging from Capsule motels to obentos, from anime to sushi. Japanese culture is one whirlwind of an experience. Julian Sensei only reinforces my growing love for the life-changing experience that Japan has to offer.

The class that Ms. Julian teaches simulates the remarkable culture of Japan, right here at St. Paul’s. Julian Sensei’s class is nothing short of sensational, and, although pursuing a future of Japanese outside of St. Paul’s is very likely, leaving Ms. Julian’s class in three years will be tough. I have really grown with my classmates with whom, for the most part, I have lived with for two years, and will continue to until I graduate. The interactive games and the fun and comfortable atmosphere really give me and my classmates a perfect opportunity to learn and to have fun.

Every day, I have no idea what to expect when I jump into Japanese class. Of course we have the usual bowing before and after each lesson and a rough outline for the day written on the board, but other than that, I’m not sure what sort of festivities lie ahead of me. The interactive games, which sometimes are done on our own personal whiteboards, really give the class a sense of relaxation. Of course, learning is the top priority in the class, and the games energize me into a competitive spirit that allows me learn the culture.

According to CNN, Japanese is one of the hardest languages in the world to learn. There are three alphabets, and seemingly endless amounts of Kanji (a system of Japanese writing using Chinese characters). Yet, Japanese is my favorite class of the day and it is something I look forward to on my schedule. Learning new and interesting kanji, cool new words, and offbeat but fascinating cultural notes, challenges me, but reinforces the idea that Japan will be a country I wish to visit. Ms. Julian has a sense of humor, a positive attitude, high expectations, fairness, and flexibility; all these characteristics make her one of the best teachers that St. Paul’s has to offer.
I have been taking Japanese at St. Paul’s for 12 years. I have dedicated a significant amount of time and energy into it, and it has certainly given back to me. Throughout my Lower and Middle School careers, I had two great Japanese teachers. But, nothing could compare to the amount of attention and dedication that Julian sensei would soon provide me.

The difficulty level between Japanese in Middle School and Upper School is certainly drastic. And, this transition may have been overwhelming if it wasn’t for Julian sensei. During my four years in the Upper School, Japanese has always been my most difficult class. I have not always been able to quickly pick-up the material, and do not have as firm of an understanding of some of the material as my peers. In any other class, I would have been extremely discouraged, and even embarrassed. But, the environment in the Japanese room is not like any other class. Julian sensei creates a warm, friendly, and welcoming atmosphere that drove me forward.

The atmosphere that is created in Japanese has had a significant impact on me in other classes, and even outside of the classroom in general. During countless hours of meeting with Julian sensei for extra help, or to complete extra credit assignments, she has taught me much more than just a language. She guided me to the realization that although I may not have the natural understanding of Japanese that other students do, dedication and perseverance can allow me to be just as successful as they are.

Japanese has had a bigger impact on me than I ever would have imagined. I was inspired to write my college essay on my experience in Japanese class, and always look back on it when I am faced with any form of adversity. While Julian sensei does an amazing job of teaching her students about the language and culture of Japan, she also inspires her students to push themselves not only in Japanese class, but in everything that they do.
I have been teaching English at Suiryo High School for 22 years, and a few years after I joined Suiryo, our “sister school” relationship started. Many of our students are interested in visiting your school, SPSG, so we have to interview them and choose which students we should send. They always have a very good time at SPSG. They enjoyed teaching Japanese language and showing some traditional Japanese culture such as tea ceremony and origami. They also had a wonderful time with their host families. They were supported by their host mother, father, sisters and brothers. They were shown many places, like Washington D.C, New York and the harbor at Baltimore. When they come back to Japan, they just continue talking about what they experienced while staying there. They talk about how wonderful the teachers and students at SPSG were and how kind the host families were to them.

Our students usually made their reports to all Suiryo students. They told them what they saw, heard and ate in Maryland and what they were surprised at during their stay. They used some pictures and concluded with what they learned there.

I am sure they will never forget their experiences and that they will affect their lives for a long time. Some students might go to universities in the U.S. after graduating, and others might become interpreters or work for trading companies. Their experiences affect the students who don’t have any experiences of going abroad. They are ready to accept guests from foreign countries and some of them choose universities that have study abroad programs.

I am confident that the experiences have made great impacts to the Suiryo’s history, and we strongly think that we should continue this relationship for long.
Having spent four months in Baltimore, I realized that there are two types of experiences: expected experiences and unexpected experiences. The difference in the food culture was one of the factors for expected experiences as I knew there would be a massive difference in what Japanese and American people eat and my eating habit will going to change. Before coming here, I have not had too many Mexican foods and I really enjoy dynamic tastes of foods in America while I miss delicate taste of the Japanese foods.

In contrast to the expected experiences, unexpected experiences are the ones that we might have known, but we do not have any clue how significant or not it would be. For me, the biggest unexpected experience was from the difference in the ways of transportation. In Japan, the most common way of traveling is by subways. I had knowledge of America that everyone travels by cars, but I did not know how the difference would affect my life. I could not predict about the simple fact that I cannot go anywhere without cars when there are no subway stations nearby. Life with subways that go everywhere was so normal for me that I did not know how beneficial it was until I left Japan.

Experiencing cultural differences are like eating Maryland crabs. The more you try to make the most out of it, the more you will get. Hence, although I have already spent four months in Baltimore, I am still excited as I was before coming here to experience many things.

I came to America to study abroad on August 11th, and more than four months have passed since I first came here. I have experienced new things and I still have new things to learn each day.

The best thing I learned in all my experience in America is that all of American people are individualist who have their own different opinion and state it. In Japan, everyone tends to follow other’s opinions because they have no clear one by themselves. In fact, I was confused to what to say because I was used to living in the Japanese style, but I could state my opinions since I realized that I had to be a positive person who likes myself and have self-confidence. This is an example of things that I learned by learning different culture in America.

I am sure that we can discover what we lack or need through study abroad experiences. Of course, we have risks, such as losing the precious high school days or the curriculum that we have to study for entering university in our native country. But studying abroad can obtain more precious experiences than when we spend similar days in our country and my experience proves it right. We can also make friends easily that we can communicate deeply after we graduate from high school or university. We might be able to acquire something when we spend our life alone without our family’s support.
Ever since I came to St. Paul’s, Japanese has been an important part of my life. It continues to be one of my favorite classes. I developed a strong desire to visit Japan and become immersed in its culture even before I came to St. Paul’s. In the summer of 2013, I was privileged enough to find myself miles above the Pacific, getting closer to my dream with every passing second. To my comfort, I already had a close relationship with my host sister prior to my stay. Saki Kumagai, who is now my good friend, had been a guest in our house during her trip to America a few months ago. Although our time together would be limited, I was overjoyed to know that we could be a family again.

I originally imagined our arrival to be more of a climatic event. However, we had hardly any energy to rejoice. Time felt backwards, and all of our senses dulled from lack of sleep. After driving an hour from Narita airport, we finally reached the school. I was incredibly excited to meet my host family, but to my surprise there was no one there to greet me. I soon found out that I would be driven by two teachers to Saki’s home, as there was no one in her family who could drive. After about thirty minutes, I was finally reunited with my host sister. From the very beginning, I faced hardly any troubles in Saki’s home. Her family was so kind and hospitable that I never felt uncomfortable. I also never had to worry about communication. Fortunately, Saki spoke English so well that I scarcely ever had a problem. I told her to speak in Japanese frequently, but she would usually slip into English out of habit.

When I wasn’t with Saki, I had to fend for myself. Being unable to speak English for the first time was challenging. I could only pick up a few words, questions were difficult to understand, and my answers came out in broken Japanese. With only textbook knowledge, it was hard to communicate my thoughts in an expressive way. By the end of the trip, I felt as if my Japanese only slightly improved. Though it was heartbreaking to leave such a wonderful community, I cherish every moment spent with the new friends I made.

A few weeks before Halloween, something entirely unexpected happened. Suiyo High School was offering two students from St. Paul’s the opportunity to visit their school for 5 days. To say the least, I was ecstatic. I hadn’t been more excited about anything in my life. To my great fortune, I was selected to represent our school in Japan once again.

My home environment this time was drastically different. Not one of my new family members spoke English as well as Saki, and I had to trust in my abilities alone. In all honesty, I expected the endeavor to be much more challenging than it had turned out to be. My host parents were extremely patient with me, making sure that I heard every syllable they spoke. Eventually they didn’t need to monitor their speed, as I was able to follow conversations with ease. It was the most fun I’ve ever had. To me, the best part of being in Japan was effectively communicating in the language and creating new relationship with the people I met. I look forward to the day where I can again immerse myself in Japanese culture, learning and improving all the while.
Before making the journey to Japan I was confident because of my prior three-week experience. Despite my confidence though there was a small piece of me that was questioning how a longer stay in Japan would be different from my prior experience. In addition another St. Paul’s Student, Connor Coleman, would be going to Japan as well. Connor and myself were optimistic that we could tackle everything Japan had to offer. Since we both lived in Hereford, a rural area, it was ironic that we would be living in one of the most populated cities in the world. So despite some modest apprehension, I went to Japan on March 11th, 2013, for my three-month stay.

When I first landed in Tokyo nothing had changed from the previous year. Memories rushed back in my mind as I saw old friends as I walked out of the terminal. Soon after, I was introduced to my first host family, The Suzukis. The Suzukis had kindly offered to host me for the first two weeks of my stay in Japan. The Suzukis had four children, three boys and a girl. It was a new experience having siblings because I am an only child. I enjoyed having temporary brothers and a sister as it allowed me to feel a sense of closeness on the first day of my stay.

One fact I learned about the Japanese schools is that their schedules are completely different than those in America. For example Gakushuin, St. Paul’s sister school, was in the middle of transitioning between school years. That is because in Japan the school year goes from April to March of the following year. Therefore, I did not attend school until April, giving me time to adjust to my new life.

In the two weeks before I started school I learned about Tokyo and special locations, so that later I could navigate through the city by myself. One aspect of Tokyo that is different than the United States is the train system. The train system in Tokyo, although large, becomes familiar quickly. Tokyo’s safe atmosphere coinciding with the independence needed to travel made the trip perfect. Often I would use my knowledge of the train system to see famous areas by myself, or with Connor. Some of the locations Connor and I travelled to included Kamakura, Disney Sea, and the National History Museum.

After the two-week period of no school, I was prepared to start attending Gakushuin High School. Luckily, the Akita’s, my new host family lived within walking distance to Gakushuin. As a result the short distance allowed me to go back and forth easily from school to home. I owe most of my great experiences to my host mother and father because they did a lot to ensure that I was always having a great time.

Besides my host mom and dad, I had a host sister who attended the University of Gakushuin. Through her, I gained exposure to college students and the college life. This gave me a perspective on what life would be similar to if I should choose to study abroad in Japan in the future. The balance between the college and high school life was great because it gave me opportunities to see both.

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The students at Gakushuin High School allowed for an easy transition. Immediately I joined the track and field club and began meeting new friends. I found my home at Gakushuin through the track and field program and was able to relate to many of the runners on the team. To start the year, the track and field team took a trip to an old Olympic training center where we would have practice for four days. Although the trip was a new experience, I was in poor shape leading to intense soreness. However, this overnight trip allowed me to bond with my teammates, translating into friendships at Gakushuin.

When attending Gakushuin, I was able to see the differences and similarities between Japanese and American High Schools. Although understanding the classes was a challenge, the teachers did a great job communicating with me what I had to do, even if my grades did not transmit back to America. In addition to the classes a normal Japanese student would take, I took classes that were specifically organized around the exchange students. Having smaller one on one instruction was efficient because the class was able to focus on one or two aspects deeply. The concentrated exchange student class allowed me to ask specific questions concerning specific situations I encountered. The knowledge I gained from the exchange student class and the normal classes all benefitted my Japanese.

Outside of the classroom, I participated in not just Track and Field, but played Ice Hockey as well. My passion for Ice Hockey was my inspiration behind locating a team that was in Tokyo. Finding a hockey team in Tokyo was tough, but once the wheels started to roll I found myself in a great group. Since I was unable to play for Tokyo’s Select team, as they only took Japanese residents, I played for the Seibu Bears. One player on my team was a student who attended Gakushuin, which allowed me to expand my circle of friends. Not only was I able to play a sport I loved, but also seeing the cultural difference with respect to Ice Hockey was interesting. One nice aspect of any sport however is that the rules do not change, and as a result one can connect with others through similar interests.

The more I lived a full life in Japan, the faster the time seemed to pass away. As my time in Japan was coming to a close I was constantly trying to find people to visit and in some cases unfortunately see for perhaps the last time. Fortunately most of the relationships I made in Japan will last a lifetime. It was not until I was leaving that I realized the relationships I had made with people would last a life time.

The experiences I had in Japan were some of the best I have had thus far in my life. The friendships, knowledge, and independence I gained from my time in Japan are experiences one cannot learn inside a classroom. Not only did my independence increase, but through speaking the language daily I gained a new appreciation for it, leading to an increase in fluency.

Japanese has positively changed my life inside and outside of St. Paul’s. By living in Japan, I realized my aspirations to progress further with my Japanese studies through college. Studying Japanese in college is something I wish to pursue, hopefully increasing my fluency and opening new opportunities in the future.
This year, I had the pleasure of participating in the three week visit to Japan, accompanied by Mr. Matsuzaki, and more of my classmates from various grades here at the SP Upper School. To me, this trip was not only a great way to experience the culture and way of life of the Japanese, but it was a way for me to fully immerse myself into a whole other world. I want to avoid clichés here and stress how meaningful the trip was as a part of my life. When we arrived, I was extremely nervous and it was very awkward for me. I was a recently graduated freshman, still unfamiliar with some aspects of high school, and here I was, on my way to experiencing a whole new way of life from scratch. The car ride back to my host family's house foreshadowed what the experience was going to be. A lot of what goes on between you and the host families are questions and answers. It's hard, however, to understand exactly what all the questions mean. After a while throughout the trip, it become much easier to communicate, and one finds themselves speaking naturally (to the best of their ability) with the Japanese people. The exchange students participate in classes, and while I'm a little guilty myself for this, we sometimes did not. However some of these classes provided unique opportunities to experience the Japanese school systems and field trips to museums, etc. All of which allowed us to fall more and more in love with the Japanese culture. We were given responsibilities, testing our punctuality and memory skills, taking trains by ourselves to and from school, almost every morning. Our host families were all so kind, and gave us opportunities to visit some of Tokyo's most iconic places. The exchange students also visited Kyoto, a historical and traditional city in Japan, southwest of Tokyo. We all rode by Bullet train, or as the Japanese call it, a Shinkansen. We saw the historical; city and saw numerous temples and shrines, sacred in Japanese life. This tested our self control and respect for others, as one must always be careful with what they say and do in Japan.

In Japan, we all raved about the food. The food was legendary beyond description. The numerous choices and variations of each types of food, including Japanese Udon (Japanese thick white noodles in soup), Japanese Ramen (a traditionally Chinese dish of noodles in soup (my favorite)), and of course, the Japanese McDonald's, which went beyond comparison in any other McDonald's I had ever eaten before. It becomes addictive as McDonald's lined the streets at every corner, crosswalk, and train station. The other exchange students and I were able to experience the Japanese restaurant services, and how polite everyone is in Japan, something we Americans appreciate, as it is sometimes scarcely found in America. The Japanese employee system is exceptional and they demonstrate the utmost care for the consumers. This applies to all places where service is provided. All of us were able to visit and shop at places like Akihabara, a city known for selling numerous electronic goods and anime merchandise, Harajuku, a quirky place where some of the most bold personalities in Japan can be found, expressing themselves with clothes beyond the ordinary, and Shibuya, a location in Tokyo where buildings tower above the people, and departments stores with evenly organized floors of merchandise can be bought. All of these places appealed to one or more of us, as each location has something unique and special about it, consequently luring us in day after day, only to discover a shop or some small item with tremendous sentimental value, we did not see in our last visit.

This trip to Japan not only allowed me to become friends with so many of my peers I otherwise would not have introduced myself to, and it allowed me to express the "special" side of myself that so many have yet to see. This visit flew by in the blink of an eye (rhyme), and before I realized it, I was heading to the airport, ready to board a plane back to Canada, and eventually home. I had learned so much from this unique opportunity, and reflecting on it now, I have realized one key thing about the Japanese people and culture that I took away with me back home to share. This key observation was about how much detail and care the Japanese put into everything they do. Japan is filled with hard-working people determined to achieve their goals in life. Japan is the perfectly mixed country of modern and traditional culture. One minute I could be observing towering skyscrapers with signs that light up the entire area, with people walking swiftly from place to place, talking and laughing, and in the next moment, I could find myself in the presence of a historical temple, built by the forefathers of these people, hundreds of years before, in a completely quiet and respectful atmosphere filled with tradition and respect. Japan is not known for its diversity in people, but the diversity of tradition and technology found within the society is unmatched in the world.
My name is Jack Pellington and I’m in my second year of post-St. Paul’s Japanese studies at the University of Virginia. My experience at both the St. Paul’s and UVA programs has been incredible. Japanese has always been a subject that I’ve felt comfortable exploring, and I’m glad it didn’t have to end after 8+ years of studying it at St. Paul’s. As I continue to gain more and more appreciation for the language and culture of Japan, I’m constantly looking back and appreciating the tremendous benefits that I got from the program at St. Paul’s. It was very noticeable going into my first class that those with any sort of background experience were far above those without.

My current class meets five times a week and is fairly speech-intensive. Focused on getting their students ready for real life interactions with native Japanese students and for potential Japanese related post-college experiences, the professors really are top notch and make it easy to go beyond the course material. I’m immersed every day in traditions and trends via art, games, music, politics, food, and any other relevant aspect of Japanese culture. The professors definitely lead classes where we don’t just learn the language; we learn with the language.

I plan to use the skills gained from both programs in order to facilitate international relationships in any career I pursue. I’d ideally like to use them to manage or improve the functionality of hospitals in both America and in Japan. This goal does reflect many of my other interests, however I’d love to live in Japan and be able to go to a job that I enjoy all while immersing myself in a totally new cultural setting. With the courses I’m taking now as well as those from St. Paul’s under my belt, I am free to enter a variety of higher-level courses at Virginia, internships during the breaks, and international programs all year long. These opportunities are priceless, and would not be readily available to me without my Japanese background from St. Paul’s.

I’d highly recommend the St. Paul’s Japanese program to any student interested in improving their language skills, or broadening their global perspective. Learning a brand new language (especially a non-Latin one) is a fantastic way to get to experience a vastly different culture. As it has broadened my interests and real-life skillsets, I can say nothing but good things about Julian Sensei, Dr. Matsuzaki, and the entire Japanese community at St. Paul’s. Learning under their instruction was truly a one-of-a-kind experience that should not go unnoticed.
This summer I was lucky enough to be awarded a Critical Language Scholarship from the U.S. Department of State, enabling me to achieve my goal of studying abroad in Japan. I was previously prevented from doing so by my double major, which is responsible for my inability to study abroad during the regular academic year, and financial limitations, as studying abroad in the summer is typically only offered by special institutions that tend to be pricey. With the CLS program, I was able to spend 2 months in Japan, studying Japanese intensively as well as travelling and participating in various cultural activities, at absolutely no cost to me. Needless to say, going into the program I was both intimidated by its rigor and seriousness in nature, but also overwhelmed with excitement and gratefulness in the face of such an amazing opportunity. With a determined spirit but nervousness in my perceived lack of fluency in Japanese, I set off for Himeji, Japan, this past June.

I did so many things during these two months that I could write a ten-page article and not cover all of the benefits I experienced from this opportunity. So, instead I’ll focus on some things that were truly instrumental in my overall learning experience. Something I achieved, that I did not initially expect, was developing close friendships with many Japanese people. Our daily classes were held at a Japanese University, Himeji Dokkyo University, and although the CLS program has its own independent unit inside the university, I actually spent a great deal of time getting to know the regular university students. I thought that since my Japanese speaking ability was still at intermediate-level, I would not be able to converse in a natural enough way to be able to develop meaningful relationships with native Japanese speakers. I felt that the Japanese students might not want to spend the time and exert the energy to listen and speak with a foreigner not fluent in Japanese, or that they might even laugh at my mistakes. I could not have been more wrong. I was met with a campus filled with students who were not just willing, but excited to speak with me, learn about me, find out about what I’m doing, and were all-around friendly to me. They showed extreme patience and kindness in helping me find words or expressions I couldn’t quite recall, or explaining complicated terms and expressions to me in simple terms so I could gradually put together the meaning. As time went on I felt more and more comfortable speaking, and gained confidence in that I could express my opinions and personality while speaking in a language other than English. The time I spent developing friendships with Japanese students, completely outside of my class work, is largely responsible for the huge gains I made in my Japanese speaking ability this summer.

Although I was very focused on doing well in class, I also made time on the weekends to explore Himeji and get out of my daily school routine. With my Japanese friends I traveled by bus to the foot of a nearby mountain, Shosha-zan, and made the climb on foot (rather than taking the ropeway option), visiting
numerous small shrines and beautiful vistas along the way. At the summit we arrived at a historic, stunningly beautiful Buddhist temple, and celebrated our feat with a bento lunch and traditional Japanese sweets. Aside from setting out on excursions with friends, I also made time to go on walks by myself and go on shopping trips to the nearby strip mall, to gain more experience interacting with Japanese people without the emotional aid of having a Japanese friend nearby. Because I took these risks, I learned a lot about how to behave and speak in different situations, and even built relationships with local people around Himeji. I became a regular at a café near the train station, to the point that the shopkeepers would smile and say “It’s McDonnell-san!” whenever I came in for my usual café-au-lait. These experiences were invaluable to my language learning as well as my deepened appreciation and understanding of the nuances in Japanese culture.

If you ask different people about their study abroad experiences, you will get entirely different answers from each person. This is because study abroad is what you make of it. If you go in with an open mind and have realistic expectations of yourself, you will achieve beyond what you can imagine. Taking classwork and assignments seriously is always important, but it’s also important to take advantage of other opportunities, too. If you are lucky enough to study abroad, get everything out of it that you can. If you do, I have no doubt you will look back and think, “That was one of the best times of my life.”

And if you’re still in high school, but thinking about studying abroad in Japan (or anywhere else) in the future, I have one thing to say to you: Do it. I know many seniors here at Carnegie Mellon who say that they wish they had made the time, found the opportunity, and experienced study abroad while they still had the option.

To find out more about the Critical Language Scholarship offered by the U.S. Department of State, visit http://clscholarship.org, or email me at dervla@cmu.edu.
Our experience with Japanese as a language began with St Paul’s when Kyle was in Pre-first. At that time, the school presented to the students the opportunity to study Japanese for one semester and Spanish the other semester. This opportunity exposed the students and parents to both language programs. After experiencing both, Kyle expressed an interest in Japanese. And so began our journey. Kyle seemed to take to the language very quickly. With the enthusiastic and creative teacher, Kimura Sensei, he thrived in the class and loved studying the language.

Two years later, Kyle’s sister Kaitlin started at St Paul’s and again we had to decide between Japanese and Spanish. Whether initially it was because her brother was already in the program and/or because she enjoyed it, Kaitlin also began her journey with the Japanese language. She too seemed to thrive in the program. She loved the language and loved Kimura Sensei. Ms. Kimura’s ability to teach Japanese and spread her love for the language and the culture was amazing.

Kaitlin’s love for Japanese continued - it was one of her favorite subjects. Therefore she decided to continue studying the language in the middle school under Tojo Sensei and in the Upper School under Julian Sensei. It has been inspiring to see her advance in her studies of the language. Not only has the program enriched her, it created a desire to learn more about the Japanese cultures. This curiosity motivated Kaitlin to apply for the two week summer trip to Japan. She was accepted and traveled to Japan with her classmates the summer before her Senior Year. It was an incredible experience for her and one she will remember forever.

In 2002, our son Ned Moreland was introduced to the Japanese program as a pre-first student. His commitment to learning Japanese has positively affected his St. Paul’s experience.

The Japanese program at St. Paul’s is a unique and special community. The Sensei’s are more than teachers and go beyond the classroom. They are mentors in every sense and encourage each student to reach their full potential. They have hosted Japanese dinners and cultural exchanges to benefit our students. The St. Paul’s Japanese program provides a true immersion to the culture of Japan for its students.

During his freshman and sophomore years, our son participated in both the three week and four month Gakushuin study abroad exchange programs in Tokyo. The School and host families were extremely helpful, even helping our son navigate the Tokyo subway schedule to travel for hockey practice with a Tokyo youth hockey team two nights a week.

Ned’s Japanese host families and Gakushuin recognize that when your son is away from home that they are his family and all the email and Skyping in the world cannot make up for that personal contact. We will be forever grateful for the Gakushuin host families and the opportunities they provided our son.

The St. Paul’s Japanese program has opened many doors for our son to become an independent world traveler, make international friends, and improve his proficiency in the Japanese language. Our family has also directly benefited and enjoyed being a part of such a special School community!

ありがとうございます。Kimura Sensei, Julian Sensei and Matsuzaki Sensei.