Our Story

In 1988, Michigan and Shiga signed an agreement to create the Japan Center for Michigan Universities (JCMU). JCMU is operated by a consortium of Michigan’s 15 public universities, while the buildings and grounds are provided by Shiga Prefecture. JCMU’s on-site staff works closely with prefectural officials and local partners, including the University of Shiga Prefecture and Shiga University, to design and implement cultural exchange activities and engaging academic experiences.

Over the last 25 years, JCMU has expanded its programming beyond language and culture and now offers a diverse array of study abroad options throughout the year. In addition to its intensive Japanese language programs, JCMU has a growing number of professionally-oriented options, including internships, and supports a portfolio of faculty-led short courses covering a variety of topics every year. Through this combination of programs, JCMU strives to make Japan a potential study abroad location for all students.

Our Mission

JCMU is committed to providing programs that uphold the highest academic standards while remaining accessible to students from all areas of Michigan, Shiga Prefecture, and beyond. JCMU endeavors to provide affordable access to a diverse selection of stimulating academic and intercultural opportunities, regardless of a student’s background, training, or experience. JCMU welcomes participants from colleges and universities worldwide, including undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional students.

The JCMU Experience

JCMU is strongly rooted in the surrounding community and works closely with all of its partners to facilitate cross-cultural exchange. JCMU students are regularly included in local events, volunteer opportunities, field trips, and unique partnerships that foster lasting friendships. Many JCMU programs also include homestays with local Japanese families or allow students to live alongside Japanese students. Regularly scheduled activities at the Center provide an additional level of exposure to Japanese culture.

Faculty engagement is another critical aspect of the JCMU experience. Along with on-site faculty, JCMU welcomes local scholars from its partner universities and academics from around the world. Visiting scholars serve as leaders for our May Short Courses and bring professional expertise to the JCMU Culture/Career Hybrid Programs.

Study Abroad is for Everyone!

JCMU has been recognized by the Diversity in Global Education Network and the Institute for International Education (IIE) for excellence in diversity and student services, demonstrating JCMU’s progress in removing obstacles for students with disabilities and health conditions. JCMU’s efforts also include addressing barriers that have traditionally impeded ethnic and racial minority, community college, non-traditional, and other students from international education.
Japanese Language & Culture Programs

JCMU offers Beginning (first-year) through advanced (fourth-year) Japanese. One semester of Japanese language study at JCMU is equivalent to one full year of collegiate Japanese coursework at most U.S. universities. Students on JCMU’s language and culture programs also participate in a range of engaging activities, such as field trips, cultural demonstrations, conversation partners, and homestays. No prior Japanese language study is required.

Semester & Academic Year Programs

In addition to Japanese language, students take at least one elective course offered at local Japanese universities or at the Center. Students may also participate in local internships or volunteer opportunities, or may join local intercultural groups and clubs at the nearby universities. Offered in the fall (early September through mid-December) or spring/winter (early January through mid-April), students may choose to participate in a single semester or a full academic year on a schedule closely resembling that used at many U.S. institutions.

Summer Intensive Language Program

Offered every summer, this program presents the same Japanese language coursework as the semester program compressed into a 9-week format (early June through early to mid-August).

Professionally-Focused Summer Programs

JCMU’s award-winning Career/Culture Hybrid Programs (CCHPs) are ideal for students seeking to add an international dimension and cross-cultural experience to their education. All courses are taught in English, so no prior Japanese study is required. Currently, programs are available in the following fields:

- Environmental Sciences
- Health Care
- Teaching English (TESOL)

In addition to their coursework in one of the areas above, all CCHP students take an introductory course in Japanese culture and society while participating in engaging lectures, hands-on cultural activities, field trips, and local events.

Summer Internship Program

This 12-week program combines advanced-level Japanese language study with a full-time internship based on the student’s career interests. Participants gain substantive professional experience working in Japan while further developing their language skills and cross-cultural competencies. Past placements include government offices, schools, museums, international corporations, research & development firms, non-profit organizations, and more. The JCMU staff provides support through weekly meetings throughout the internship.

May Short Courses

These 2- or 3-week courses taught by visiting scholars each cover one of a variety of topics, which alternate by year. Open to all majors and taught in English, May Short Courses make study abroad an easy fit for any academic plan. Past topics include Japanese history, politics, religions, business communication, and photography.
Location

JCMU is located in Hikone, a city of approximately 100,000 people in Shiga Prefecture situated on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan. Hikone is a castle town that can trace its origins to the early seventeenth century when a cluster of samurai residences and commercial establishments sprung up at the foot of the castle. The original castle buildings survive, as do many of the traditional industries.

Located off the beaten tourist track, Hikone preserves much of its charm and traditional values. At the same time, Hikone is only a 45-90 minute local train ride from the large cosmopolitan cities of Kyoto, Nagoya, and Osaka. Given this location, students and visitors have easy access to a wide range of cultural resources.