

Researching Japanese Culture and Society (3 credits)

The Japan Center for Michigan Universities
Hikone, Shiga, Japan
In affiliation with Michigan State University
Fall Semester 2015
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Course Description

This course adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of Japanese culture and society. The conceptual framework that supports this approach draws on perspectives from social anthropology, sociology, social psychology and semiotics. The course will look at a broad range of topics concerned with politics, social issues, work, family life, education and entertainment. In each case the analytical focus will be on uncovering patterns in relation to social norms, cultural practices, identity and collective consciousness.

Lectures and seminar discussions will examine a variety of research materials, including academic papers, news media and documentary films. Instruction will also be given on qualitative research methods for cultural studies. The intention will be to prepare students to conduct two independent research projects that constitute the bulk of the course assessment. The first research project will be delivered as an academic presentation, whereas the second project takes the form of a report based on ethnographic fieldwork.

A number of field trips will be planned to support the teaching and learning objectives of the course. Participation in class will be assessed and students will be expected to complete background-reading tasks in order to prepare for discussions.

Instruction Objectives:

1. To cultivate a multifaceted analytical perspective towards the study of Japanese culture and society
2. To extend cultural knowledge of Japan by engaging in critical reflection on personal experiences.
3. To gain practical skills in social research methods.

Course Requirements, Assignments and Evaluations

Punctuality and Attendance: Students are required to attend all lectures, meetings, field trip and other scheduled events programmed for this course. Excessive

tardiness to class and class activities may result in the dismissal of a student from a program.

Absence Policy: Your attendance is very important not only to you but also to other classmates. Due to the nature of Study Abroad, no unannounced absences will be permitted. Please refer Office of Study Abroad for further details (<http://studyabroad.msu.edu>). Your tardiness may be counted as 1/2 unexcused absence. Excessive unexcused absences may result in dismissal from the course.

Preparation and Participation

This class will require some background reading and review of the materials covered in classes. This background reading is required and necessary to facilitate meaningful participation in certain class discussions. Students are also expected to fully contribute to open discussions about the experience of living and studying in Japan.

Participation and a willingness to engage in discussions are the key element to your success in this course. Class discussion and interactivity with the class as a whole is critical to developing your awareness of the content covered. Students that are either not prepared or reticent to participate will be asked to leave the class and will be marked as absent. Participation constitutes 10% of your grade.

Students are evaluated on the following basis.

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 1. | Class Participation This mark will reflect the level of active participation and meaningful contribution in all class discussions. | 10% |
| 2. | Research Project I Students are required to conduct an independent research project into an aspect/topic of relevance to Japanese cultural studies. The research findings will be delivered via a 15-20 minute <u>academic presentation</u> (not including Q&A). | 30% |
| 3. | Research Project II Research Proposal (10%), Final Report (40%) (See notes below). | 60% |

Research Project II:

Over the duration of the course, students will be required to conduct fieldwork and engage in the processes of ethnographic research. As with the presentation project, students will pursue research questions on topics that reflect their own interests in Japanese culture and society. The culmination of this project is the submission of a research report that incorporates a 'portfolio' of ethnographic writings. These writings document the student's significant cultural experiences 'in the field'.

Instruction will be provided on types of ethnographic writing. Students will be required to submit a research proposal and attend project supervision meetings with their tutor. Guidance on word length of the final report as well as formatting will be given in class, however the submitted work should be grammatically correct.

Required & Recommended Reading

All required and recommended readings will be provided as either class handouts or as links to documents and articles online. Students will be expected to print off a copy of an online document (if asked to) and bring it to class.

Academic Honesty and Classroom Etiquette

Students should always value academic honesty in their own work. In addition to other things, plagiarism is considered among the most blatant forms of academic dishonesty. This means that a student will not submit any written work that has been copied from the internet or any other form of published media. Additionally a student will not submit any work that has been written by another person without citing that source and will never submit another’s work as his/her own. This would also include unacknowledged paraphrasing. As specified by university policy, such academic dishonesty may result in a penalty grade for the course. For more information on academic dishonesty policy please refer to the Ombudsman webpage:

<https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/honestylinks.html>

Grading Criteria and Grading Scale

You will be graded on three elements:

- a) Participation, b) Research Project I-Presentation) c) Research Project II - Report.

| Participation | Research Project I | Research Project II |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 10% | 30% | 60% |

Note: Participation means “active” participation. Simply being there is not the same as participating. Points for participation will be awarded only when students are actively engaging in classroom activities, discussion, field exploration, and other learning activities for this course.

Grade Breakdown

Conversion Table between 4.0 Scale and Points

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------|
| 4.0 | 3.5 | 3.0 | 2.5 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 1.0 | 0.0 |
| point | | | | | | | |
| 90-100 | 85-89 | 80-84 | 75-79 | 70-74 | 65-69 | 60-64 | 59 & below |

Class Schedule

T.B.D