

Course Syllabus – Fall Semester 2023  
IAH 211B: Area Studies and Multicultural Civilizations: Asia

## **Japanese Culture and Society**

**Japan Center for Michigan Universities (JCMU)**

**Hikone, Shiga Prefecture, JAPAN: *In accordance with Michigan State University policy***

**4 Credits: Lectures (30 hours) + Field Work: Total 60 hours**

**Instructor: Benjamin J. McCracken**

Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00- 4:30 P.M. (Class times may be longer due to travel times for field trips and excursions.)

Office Hours: By appointment: Please email me. E-mail: [bmccracken@jcmu.org](mailto:bmccracken@jcmu.org)

### **Goals of Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities (IAH)**

Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities at MSU seeks to assist students to become more familiar with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities. IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s); they also encourage students to learn more about the history and culture of other societies. They focus on key ideas and issues in human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship; highlight the value of the creative arts and literature, theater, music, and arts; and alert us to important issues that occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world.

### **Description of the Course**

This course focuses on unique history and world perspective and how these things continue to play a role in the evolution of Japanese culture and society. We will observe the evolution of Japanese society from a feudal culture to an economic superpower by examining its culture and history. Simultaneously, we will look at what is happening in the world as it pertains to and influences Japan. Finally, we will discuss what it means to be Japanese in contemporary Japan.

Throughout the course, we will examine how isolation, cultural diffusion, religion, and the arts influence the development of Japanese society. Through comparative analysis of the history and culture of Japan during its quest to be seen as equal to powerful Western nations, this course aims to raise students' consciousness about the dynamic and powerful relationship between cultural development and the human experience. Because the course is offered on-site in Japan, students will be able to incorporate first-hand observations of contemporary Japan into their writing assignments and class discussions.

## **Instructional Objectives**

1. To learn more about and be able to compare one's own cultural and historical conditions through comparative inquiries of Japan;
2. To recognize culture and history as properties that are conditioned by our own way of thinking;
3. To gain skills to facilitate inquiry into globalization and its impacts from multiple and diverse cultural, intellectual and sociological perspectives.

## **Course Requirements, Assignments and Evaluations**

**Punctuality and Attendance:** Students are required to attend all lectures, field observations, and other scheduled events programmed for this course. Excessive tardiness to class and class activities may result in the dismissal of a student from the 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. Your tardiness may be counted as 1/2 unexcused absence. Excessive unexcused absences may result in dismissal.

**Preparation and Participation:** The student is expected to prepare for class by completing the reading assignments and preparing for selected discussion topics prior to attending class. Participation is a key element to your success in this course. Class discussion and interactivity with the class as a whole is critical to developing an awareness of the content described in lectures and readings. Participation constitutes 10% of your grade.

**Class Writing Assignments:** Students are required to demonstrate their knowledge of key concepts based on what they have learned during their Study Abroad program through a series of written assignments. The students will have flexibility in showing what they have learned. This will also allow the participants to reflect broadly about cultural experiences and cultural values and how these figure into major lessons learned. The following assignments are required for the successful completion of this course:

- Eight (8) writing assignments based on class content and fieldwork (1 page each, single spaced)

**Presentations:** Students will be required to give a presentation on an area of the arts or humanities in Japan where they have special interest. Students will be given maximum flexibility to demonstrate what they have learned through field excursions and in class.

**Workshop:** Students will be required to give participate in a workshop on the UN SDGs with Japanese university students.

### **Academic Honesty and Classroom Etiquette**

Students must value academic honesty in their own work. In addition to other malpractices, 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 MSU Ombudsperson's webpage: <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/plagiarism-policy.html>

### **Grading Criteria and Grading Scale**

Students will be graded on four distinct course elements:

- a) Writing assignments (40%)
- b) Presentation (30%)
- c) Attendance (20%)\*
- d) Participation (10%)\*\*

\* Attendance makes up 20% of the whole course grade. If a student excessively misses classes without advising the instructor, the student may be terminated from the course.

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

The conversion table between the 4.0 grading scale and point system is as follows:

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

### **Online SIRS Evaluation Policy**

Michigan State University (MSU) takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SIRS system, and you will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. In addition, participation in the online SIRS system involves grade sequestration, which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO

during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. We hope, however, that you will be willing to give us your frank and constructive feedback so that we may instruct students even better in the future. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

### **Class Schedule and Assignments**

Please note that the student is expected to have read and studied the assigned reading and prepared for discussions *prior* to each class. Be sure to bring to class the texts under discussion. Field work is counted as class time: you will be required to keep notes and write summaries in order to draft the one-page papers described below.

**Class 1:** Intro: About Japan and Shiga. Summary of the history of Japan and Hikone City and introduction to the study of culture.

**Reading:** There was a crooked man... by David Erik Nelson (Short story)  
Kino by Murakami Haruki (Short story)

**Class 2:** Feudal Japan (Lecture and field trip to Hikone Castle)

Explore life of a lord during the Edo Period by visiting Hikone Castle, Rakuen garden, and the Hikone Castle Museum.

**Reading: Hikone: A Journey In Time (Manga)**  
**Writing Assignment 1** (1 page single spaced) **Impressions of Hikone Castle**

**Class 3:** From Feudal to Modern Japan

Explore the life of elite Japanese and onsen geisha as Japan opens to the modern world

**Reading:** Snow Country by Yasunari Kawabata  
**Writing Assignment 2** (1 page single spaced) **Impressions Snow Country**

**Class 4:** Introduction to the UNSDGs and how they impact Japan)

Explore the life of ordinary people by looking at life during the Edo, Meiji, and modern periods.

**Reading:** UN SDGs Guide

**Class 5:** Hiroshima and post war Japan (Lecture and film)

Students will learn about the horrors of war visited upon the population of Japan.

**Film:** Barefoot Gen (Japanese Animation)  
**Writing Assignment 3** (1 page single spaced) **Impressions of Barefoot Gen**

**Class 6: Who are the post-war Japanese (Lecture and film)**

Students will learn about the cultural transition that took place after WWII modern Japanese people and about what Japan is doing now to impact the world

**Film:** Godzilla

**Writing Assignment 4** (1 page single-spaced) **Impressions of Godzilla**

**Class 6: Field Trip to Lake Biwa Museum**

Students will gain an appreciation for the history and people of Shiga Prefecture.

**Writing Assignment 5** (1 page single-spaced) **Impressions of Japanese Soft Power**

**Class 7: Introduction to Japanese Religion (Lecture and field trip to Local Religious sites)**

Students will learn about Shintoism and Buddhism, the two most popular religions in Japan.

Students will have a chance to visit significant religious sites for both religions located in Shiga.

**Writing Assignment 6** (1 page single-spaced) **Impressions of Japanese Religions**

**Class 8: Introduction to Japanese Entertainment (Lecture and field trip to Japanese Karaoke Box)**

Students will explore how Japanese relax and enjoy Karaoke.

**Class 9: Who are the modern Japanese (Lecture and discussion)**

Students will learn about modern Japanese people.

**Reading:** A wild sheep Chase by Murakami Haruki

**Writing Assignment 7** (1 page single spaced) **Impressions of a Wild Sheep Chase**

**Class 10** SDGs Workshop with Japanese University Students.

**Class 11: SATURDAY: (Field Trip)**

Students will explore a famous location in Japan. Location to be determined

**Writing Assignment 8** (1 page single spaced) **Impressions on Field Trip.**

**Class 12:** Student Presentations

**Class 13:** Student Presentations

**Class 14:** Student Presentations