

# Japanese Politics and Diplomacy

**Dates:** September 4<sup>th</sup> – December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Location:** Japan Center for Michigan Universities (JCMU), Hikone, Shiga Prefecture, JAPAN

**Instructors:** Benjamin J. McCracken, JD and Christopher Garth, MA

**Instructor Contacts:** [mccrack6@msu.edu](mailto:mccrack6@msu.edu) or [bmccracken@jcmu.org](mailto:bmccracken@jcmu.org); [cgarth@jcmu.org](mailto:cgarth@jcmu.org)

**Class Times:** Tuesdays / Thursdays 3:00 PM - 5:15 PM JST

*\*Class times may be longer due to travel times for field trips/excursions.*

**Office Hours:** By appointment

## Course Description

*Japanese Politics and Diplomacy* explores Japan's political structure, governance, and diplomatic strategies in the global arena. Through lectures, discussions, and immersive field trips, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of Japan's political institutions, electoral systems, foreign relations, and contemporary challenges. This course incorporates hands-on learning by engaging with local government officials, policymakers, and diplomats. Open to JCMU study abroad students ONLY.

Upon completion of the ISS course sequence, students will be able to:

- Identify established disciplinary ways of knowing within the social sciences and integrate these perspectives and methods around complex social issues.
- Expand their personal perspectives around shared and complex problems to better understand and include the diverse perspectives of others—particularly in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion from underrepresented and/or marginalized voices.
- Identify ways to use social scientific thinking to positively affect their own lives, their local and global communities, other disciplines, and/or their career fields.

## Learning Objectives and Expected Outcomes

- Understand Japan's political history and institutions
- Analyze the electoral system, major parties, and policymaking
- Evaluate Japan's foreign relations and diplomatic strategies
- Examine local and prefectural governance
- Gain first-hand experience through field visits and expert interaction
- Synthesize their learning in a capstone research paper and presentation

## Required Readings

*All required textbooks, readings, and other course materials will be supplied to students by JCMU in Japan. All readings are in English.*

- Curtis, Gerald L. [\*Japan's Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Coping with Change\*](#). Routledge; 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (1993).
- Hayes, Louis D. [\*The Government and Politics of Japan\*](#). Routledge; 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (2017).
- Matsui, Shigenori. [\*The Japanese Constitution: A Contextual Analysis\*](#). Bloomsbury; 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (2010).

## Required Assignments

Students will be required to complete the following assignments, which along with course attendance/participation will comprise their final grade in the course:

### Field Trip Reflection Papers (3 reflection papers; each 10% of total grade)

Assessment Breakdown:

- Analysis/insight: 40%
- Connection to course themes: 30%
- Organization and clarity: 20%
- Grammar/mechanics: 10%

### Capstone Research Paper (30% of total grade)

Assessment Breakdown:

- Depth of analysis and articulation of thesis statement/core argumentation: 40%
- Use of sources and research: 30%
- Organization and flow: 15%
- Formatting, grammar, and correct citation: 15%

### Capstone Presentation (20% of total grade)

Assessment Breakdown:

- Clarity and organization: 30%
- Knowledge of topic and depth of presentation: 30%
- Engagement and delivery: 20%
- Visuals/slides (if used): 10%
- Responses to questions: 10%

### Participation (20% of total grade)

Assessment Breakdown:

- Attendance: 30%
- Active engagement in discussions: 40%
- Respectful interaction: 30%

## Grading Scale

The conversion between the 4.0 grading scale, letter grades, and point system for assignments/participation is as follows:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
4.0	3.5		3.0	2.5		2.0	1.5		1.0	0.0
90-100	87-89	84-86	80-83	77-79	74-76	70-73	67-69	64-66	60-64	59 ↓

## Punctuality and Attendance

Students are required to attend all lectures, field observations, and other scheduled events programmed for this course. Excessive tardiness may result in diminished grades or potential dismissal from the program.

## Absence Policy

Active attendance is very important for success in this course. Due to the nature of study abroad, no unannounced absences will be permitted. Tardiness may be counted as 1/2 unexcused absence. Excessive unexcused absences may result in diminished grades or eventual dismissal from the program.

## Academic Integrity

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>

## Requesting Course Accommodations

JCMU is committed to providing access and inclusion to all program courses and activities. Students who require accommodations should contact the JCMU-East Lansing office in advance of their study abroad program's start date, and follow JCMU's procedures for accommodations requests: <https://jcmu.isp.msu.edu/students/diversity-inclusion/students-disabilities/>

## Seeking Assistance

Questions or concerns regarding course content, assignments, grade progress, or course accommodations should be discussed directly with the course's instructors as soon as is practicable. If you are experiencing any difficulties, or have questions during the course, please reach out to either Professor McCracken or Professor Garth via email to set up a personalized advising appointment.

# Week-by-Week Schedule

*A detailed course schedule with confirmed dates, required readings, and assignment due dates will be provided to students on the first day of class.*

## **Weeks 1-2: Foundations of Japanese Government**

Lecture Focus: Pre-WWII to post-war political systems, U.S. influence, institutions

- Excursion: Visit to Hikone Castle Ruins and Hikone Castle Museum

## **Weeks 3-4: Japanese Constitution, Article 9, and Power Structure**

Lecture Focus: 1947 Constitution, Pacifism, government branches

- Excursion: Visit to Shiga Prefectural Government

## **Weeks 5-6: Japan's Political Parties, Elections, and Bureaucracy**

Lecture Focus: Japan's political parties, election reforms, bureaucracy

Guest Speaker: Japanese Bureaucrat – about Subnational Diplomacy

Guest Speaker: Japanese Politician

## **Weeks 7-9: Japanese Diplomacy in Asia and Beyond**

Lecture Focus: The United Nations, China/Korea/ASEAN relations, FTAs

Lecture Focus: Security Treaty, the Japanese Self-Defense Force, and U.S. military bases

- Guest Speaker: JICA Official Q&A discussion
- Excursion: Osaka – Visiting with US Government Officials to discuss the US/Japan Relationship

## **Weeks 10-11: Economic Diplomacy & Development/Foreign Aid**

Lecture Focus: Japan's trade policy, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and economic strategy domestically and internationally

- Guest Speaker: JETRO Official Q&A discussion

## **Week 12-13: Local Government**

Lecture Focus: Role and responsibilities of the prefectural governments

- Field Work: shadowing government officials at either Hikone City Hall or Shiga Prefectural Government

## **Weeks 14: Capstone Presentations and Course Wrap-Up**

Capstone Presentations: Final presentations and reflections