

# **Soai's 1992 Summer Homestay/Study Abroad Program: A Survey of Student Reactions**

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Since 1987, Soai University has been organizing summer study and homestay programs in the U.S.A. for students in the Humanities Department. For the past two years, the site of the summer program has been the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley.

After a comparison of program objectives as perceived by Soai faculty members and the participants, this paper will consider student reactions to various aspects of the 1992 program, including pre-departure training, student expectations compared with the actual experience, scheduling and facilities in Colorado, activities and course work there, and contact with Americans including the homestay families. Self-report data on individual learning, personal growth, and student attitudes will also be presented in an attempt to determine the impact of the program on participating Soai students.

Based on an analysis of the data, recommendations will be made concerning future programs, and for curriculum development in the "Gaikoku Jijo I" (Preparation for Overseas Study) course given to all participants during the semester prior to departure for the U.S.A.

## **Description of the 1992 Soai Summer Program**

The 1992 Soai Summer Program was held at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley from August 2 to August 24. Twenty four students participated, including sixteen English majors and eight Japanese Studies majors, accompanied by two Soai University faculty members who were Japanese. Students were accommodated in the private homes of volunteer host families recruited by the International Student Services office of U.N.C.

During these three weeks, students attended English classes at U.N.C. for three hours a day, Monday through Thursday, usually in the morning. An English Oratory Con-

test was held during the final class on Friday, August 21, for a total of thirty-nine classroom contact hours, plus six and a half hours scheduled library study time and two to four hours of language lab time, with tours of each facility. The English classes were taught by two U.N.C. instructors.

Numerous additional social and cultural activities were also scheduled, including a campus tour and a city tour early on in the program; a visit to Centennial Village and its historical museum; activities with American students including a visit to a fraternity; a river float trip; swimming, hiking, and other recreation; a concert and a performance by Native American dancers; a picnic and a barbecue; and welcome and farewell parties. Longer field trips included a day trip to Rocky Mountain National Park on the first Friday after arrival, and a day trip to Denver at the end of the second week, plus an afternoon trip to the Colorado History Museum in Denver, and an afternoon excursion to nearby Boulder for shopping and a visit to the University of Colorado. Weekends were left free to be spent with host families.

Students who chose to participate in the summer program enrolled in a one-semester credit course at Soai University in Osaka during the spring term from April through July 1992. This course was held once a week during the fifth period of the school day (4:35-6:05) and was intended both to prepare students for the practical aspects of the Summer Program (obtaining passports and visas; providing information U.N.C. and the town of Greeley, its climate, etc.) and to develop English language skills and cultural background knowledge. This preparatory course ("Gaikoku Jijo I") was taught by the two Japanese faculty members who would accompany the students to Colorado in the summer, and included four to five guest lectures by other Soai faculty members, plus practical assistance and advice from representatives of a Japanese travel agency.

## **The Questionnaire**

Classes at Soai University resume in October for the second semester, and the students who had participated in the Summer Program met twice more in the "Gaikoku Jijo I" class on October 6 and 13. During these classes, a questionnaire in Japanese<sup>1</sup> was administered to all participants in an attempt to assess the program and its affect on student attitudes. The first part of the questionnaire asked for ratings of various aspects of the program (on a scale of one to three, or one to five) based on each student's experience, asked students to rank their reasons for participation in the program, and to assess the adequacy

of their pre-departure training. The second part of the questionnaire, administered on October 13, was an attempt to assess student attitudes after their cross-cultural experience in the U.S.A. and what they had gained from the program. It consisted of fifty subjective statements which could be answered by "True" or "False".

In addition, four Soai faculty members who were closely connected with the Summer program as either escorts accompanying the students, or members of the university's International Exchange Committee (Kokusai Koryu Inkai), were asked to define the objectives of the Summer Program as they perceived them, and to give their opinion as to why students chose to take part in the program. The faculty members consulted were Professor Yoshinari Maeda, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities; Professor Teruo Gotoda, Chairman of the International Relations Committee; Professor Kaien Kitazaki of the English Division; and Professor Shigehisa Komatsu of the General Studies Division of the Faculty of Humanities.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Program Objectives and Students' Reasons for Participation**

To assess students' reasons for participating in the 1992 Summer Program, the twenty-four participants were asked to assign point values from one point (least important) up to nine points (most important) to each of eight suggested reasons plus an optional ninth "Other" category. The results are shown on Table A as composite point scores and rankings for each reason.

Student motivation for participating in the summer program was more concerned with general personal development and challenge (ranked first by students) and cultural broadening through exposure to different kinds of people and a different culture (ranked second and third respectively) than with specific educational objectives such as improving English language skills (ranked fourth by students but first by faculty) or contributing to their general education (ranked seventh). Usefulness of the experience in future jobs ranked a low eighth.

Although students were interested in the fun aspects of travel (ranked fifth), and sightseeing and shopping (ranked sixth), their priorities as expressed in the questionnaire responses were somewhat more longterm and less superficial than faculty perceptions of their motivation. Although individual student motivation may differ, it seems that we should give them more credit for recognizing the potential impact of the overseas

study/homestay experience on their personal development, ways of thinking, and cultural awareness. However, this questionnaire was administered after the completion of the program, and students' initial objectives before departure might have been different than their perceptions after the actual experience.

Faculty members consulted for this survey placed strong importance on improving students' English skills as a program objective (see results in Table B), although they were realistic about the limitations of what could be accomplished during such a short program. Some faculty members explained that they hoped for improved motivation and "determination to study English more seriously than before,"<sup>2</sup> and more "aggressively"<sup>3</sup> after students returned to Japan, having had the experience of living outside Japan and trying to communicate with their host families and other native English speakers.

One faculty member remarked that the university faculty and administration in general seem to lack consensus concerning the objectives of the summer abroad program, and individual students have both different objectives and different levels of readiness for the experience. This latter situation cannot be helped, since at present there is no screening or language competence requirement for the program, and English majors presumably have an advantage over Japanese Studies majors in the area of language preparedness.

All four faculty members consulted for this survey felt that the Summer Program was valuable as a "cross-cultural experience"<sup>4</sup>: "to learn much American culture"<sup>5</sup>, "to realize a longheld dream of becoming a cosmopolitan person"<sup>6</sup>, and to develop "awareness ... [of] the things that were happening [in the world] around them" through the direct experience of living "in another society and hear[ing] it, see[ing] it, smell[ing] it, or feel[ing] it themselves."<sup>7</sup> Students have the opportunity to "compare their own experiences in Japan with those in Colorado" and learn "that there is a completely different people living outside this small island country."<sup>8</sup>

These are certainly laudable objectives for a study abroad program, and student responses to the attitudes questionnaire shows that they feel strongly that the program has achieved these objectives by expanding their cultural awareness, their tolerance and understanding for different values and cultures, and their specific knowledge of American customs and values. Considering the short duration of the program, and the lack of true immersion in American society because participants spent so much time in classes and group activities with their Japanese classmates, the results as indicated by the students' subjective reports are impressive. The impact on students' personal development and maturation seems to have been just as strong, and perhaps will be more lasting.

**TABLE A**

**Students' Reasons for Participating in the Program**

The 24 participating students were asked to assign point values from 1 point (least important) up to 9 points (most important) to each of eight suggested reasons (plus an optional ninth "Other" category) as to why they decided to take part in the 1992 Summer Homestay/ Study program.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Total point score</b>	<b>Description of Reason</b>
1	169	Personal development and challenge
2	162	To meet different kinds of people and make friends
3	155	To learn to understand a different culture
4	152	To improve my English language ability
5	129	To have fun
6	102	For sightseeing and shopping
7	89	To contribute to my general education
8	76	To help with future employment
9	17	Other

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**TABLE B**

**Faculty Appraisal of Why Students Participated in the Program**

Four faculty members closely involved in long term planning or in administration and advising for the 1992 Summer Program were asked to estimate student motivation using the same form as the students.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Total point score</b>	<b>Description of Reason</b>
1	30	To improve English language ability
2	26	To meet different kinds of people and make friends
3	23	Personal development and challenge
3	23	To have fun (with friends)
4	22	To learn to understand a different culture
5	17	For sightseeing and shopping
6	11	To contribute to students' general education
7	10	To help with students' future employment
8	7	Other: To earn college credits
9	5	Other: To become a cosmopolitan person
9	5	Other: To have the opportunity to go abroad

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(Based on responses from four faculty members closely involved with the Soai Summer Program.)

## **2. Student Assessment of Pre-departure Training**

In one section of the questionnaire, students were asked to evaluate their pre-departure training for the 1992 Summer Program in thirteen different categories and skills areas (see Table C), ranging from information on practical matters such as American money or the climate in Colorado, to various aspects of communicative English, and finally to cross-cultural consciousness raising. Although the questions related primarily to training received in the "Gaikoku Jijo I" preparation course, students were allowed to take into account what they had learned in other university courses as well (English Conversation, for example). Answers were selected from a scale of five descriptors: "No Information", "Little Information", "Not quite enough information", "Enough information", and "More than enough information." (In Table C, the results from "No Information" and "Little Information" have been combined together, and the category "More than enough information" has been deleted since it was not selected in any of the responses.)

The results of this section indicate that students were not completely satisfied with the preparation for the Summer Program when they analyzed it in detail. Students particularly wanted more training on how to write to their host family (96%) and how to handle their initial meeting with that family in Colorado (100%), both of which are extremely important steps in forming the student-host family relationship. 92% felt they were not sufficiently prepared to explain their own country's customs to Americans. Most also wanted more information on what to expect of daily life in an American home (71%), and more coaching on useful English expressions for communicating with their homestay families (75%) as well as training in how to deal with communication problems (79%). Based on students responses, development of cross-cultural awareness and skills also seems to be an area which needs to be dealt with more explicitly in the curriculum.

Also students felt they did not have enough training on what to expect, what to say, and how to behave on the airplane flight. Their self-assessment is supported by the personal comments of many American passengers I have met who have flown on Japan-U.S. flights. Both educators I have met at international conferences and other non-Japanese airline passengers have often remarked, after learning that I am a university professor, on the rudeness and mob mentality of Japanese student groups on international flights. We should be responsible for training Soai students before they travel abroad so that they are not only confident in their English and familiar with travel procedures, but also so that they do not contribute to the generally negative image of the Japanese group traveller.

Although time limitations of the "Gaikoku Jijo I" course (a total of only about twenty

**STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS: TABLE C**  
**Student Satisfaction with Pre-departure Training and Information**

**Student evaluation:**

**Type of Information or Training:**

	Little or no information	Not quite enough information	Enough information	% Satisfied	% Dissatisfied
1 . Practical information about U.S. money, travelers checks, etc.	3	13	9	37.5%	62.5%
2 . Information about weather, clothing and things to bring, suitcases, etc.	1	8	15	62.5%	37.5%
3 . Information about the site, program schedule, activities etc.	2	15	7	29%	71%
4 . Useful language and information about arrival and departure procedures at airports, and customs and immigration procedures	2	9	13	54%	46%
5 . Advice on how to write to host family in English	18	5	1	4%	96%
6 . Information about what to expect on the airplane flight, passenger etiquette, useful expressions, etc.	18	6	0	0%	100%
7 . What to say and do when meeting your host family for the first time	15	9	0	0%	100%
8 . What to expect about the host family, their home, daily routine, your responsibilities, etc.	7	10	7	29%	71%
9 . Useful English for communicating with the homestay family	8	8	6	25%	75%
10. Useful English for explaining Japan and Japanese culture	13	9	2	8%	92%
11. Information about American values and customs	1	12	11	46%	54%
12. Skills for understanding and dealing with communication problems if they occur	7	12	5	21%	79%
13. Knowledge about what kinds of cultural problems might happen, including information about "culture shock" and homesickness, and ideas about how to solve these problems	8	8	8	33%	67%

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hours) make it difficult to prepare students in-depth and for every aspect or eventuality of their stay in the U.S., it may be possible to revise the curriculum in the future to target specific areas where students felt particularly unprepared, such as the key area of communication with the homestay family. It may be that focusing on development of language and cross-cultural skills is more productive than giving general lectures on aspects of American culture or comparative culture; in fact, this may only repeat material covered in general studies courses such as Comparative Culture or Introduction to American Culture. It might prove more effective to give students background readings to do on their own time, reserving in-class time for more practical training, team building, and necessary administrative activities.

To balance the somewhat negative picture presented by the pre-departure preparedness results, it should be noted that in another section of the questionnaire (see Table G), students were asked a more general question as to whether their studies at Soai had prepared them well for the Summer Program, and 67.5% responded positively.

### **3. Student Expectations of the Program Compared with the Actual Experience**

Another aspect of student preparation for the experience of living and studying abroad is developing accurate and realistic expectations of what the experience will, and will not, be like. Soai students in the 1992 Summer Program were asked to rate nine different aspects of their experience on a three-descriptor scale: "Exactly as expected", "A little different from what I expected", or "Quite different from what I expected."

For the most part, the actual program experience did not differ greatly from students' recollections of their pre-departure expectations. The area where expectations differed most (33% responded "Quite different") was in opportunities to meet other Americans of the same age group, and other sections of the questionnaire also pointed to this as a weakness in the program. At most U.S. universities, few regular students attend class during the summer term. As a result, most summer programs suffer from this same problem of foreign students not having enough opportunities to meet American students. One activity in the U.N.C. course plan paired Japanese students with American students, but Soai students were still generally disappointed in the number of opportunities to meet and get to know American students. Fortunately, the success of the homestay experience seems to have compensated for this deficit in most cases.

Only forty-eight percent of the students agreed that "The friendships I made in America were close and of lasting value" (see Table G, Attitude Survey). If we consider



the uniformly high marks given to host family relationships by the same students, it would again seem that the deficit must be in developing friendships with American contemporaries. On another section of the questionnaire (see Table F, #2b), one quarter of the students said that they had formed no relationships or only casual relationships with American students while in Colorado; 21% felt they had formed "a few close relationships", but only one student claimed to have developed "several very close relationships" with American contemporaries. No doubt the host institution is continuing to look for creative approaches in order to improve this aspect of the program.

Expectations regarding host families and their homes matched reality for 79% and 67%, respectively, of the students in the program. This is a reassuring result considering the key role of the homestay experience in this program's impact on students. Also, most students' expectations about the town of Greeley, the U.N.C. campus, and its staff and faculty were not far off the mark.

As for social and recreational activities, fifty percent of the students reported that these were a little different than expected, and another 12.5% said that they were quite different. Further inquiry is necessary to find out exactly what the differences were, and whether such activities should be modified or expanded in future programs. Additional information from another section of the questionnaire (see Table E) indicates that students were generally satisfied with the content of social, recreational, and sightseeing activities, but a large number of students would have liked more program time allocated to these pursuits and less to other activities such as classes.

Twenty-five percent of the students felt that the content of U.N.C. courses was quite different than they expected, although there is no clear indication as to whether the difference was perceived as positive or negative. The number is significant enough to merit further investigation to ascertain what the perceived differences were, and whether changes need to be made in the U.N.C. course content, which is developed independently by the U.N.C. instructors and the International Student Services office. As will be seen in the next section, 71% of the students felt that too much time was spent in classes. Whether this is a reflection on the content of the classes, or just due to competing priorities, is not clear.

**TABLE D**  
**Student Expectations versus the Actual Program Experience**

Student Response:	Exactly as expected	A little different	Quite different
<b>Aspect of Program:</b>			
1. Colorado and Greeley	12 (50%)	9 (37.5%)	3 (12.5%)
2. U. N. C. campus	12 (50%)	8 (33%)	4 (17%)
3. U.N.C. faculty and staff*	15 (62.5%)	8 (33%)	0
4. U.N.C. courses	8 (33%)	10 (42%)	6 (25%)
5. Group social and recreational activities	9 (37.5%)	12 (50%)	3 (12.5%)
6. Opportunities for travel, sightseeing	14 (58%)	8 (33%)	2 (8%)
7. Opportunities to meet other Americans your age	0	16 (67%)	8 (33%)
8. Host family members	19 (79%)	5 (21%)	0
9. Host family's home	16 (67%)	8 (33%)	0
<b>Average</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>12%</b>

\*Note: One student did not respond to question 3.

#### 4. Participant Satisfaction with Program Logistics and Content

The first part of this section of the questionnaire deals with student satisfaction with the allotment of time to various activities within the program (see Table E, Part 1). Except for the category of time spent with Soai students and faculty, satisfaction ratings are all well below fifty percent, indicating a need for reassessment of the program schedule. The weakest area was the amount of time spent with American students of the same age group, and one possible cause of this deficiency has already been discussed. Students also expressed a desire for more time with host families, and more field trips and sightseeing. Obviously there is a limit to what can be done in the short space of three weeks. Interestingly, a third of the participants felt that the program was much too short, and another 42% said that it was a little too short. Perhaps in future the program could be expanded to four weeks, with the additional time spent in travel or field trips either in the immediate area, or to other outstanding places in the area such as the Grand Canyon.

Students were almost evenly divided as to whether there was enough free time or rest time, probably reflecting differences in individual personalities and energy levels.

**TABLE E**  
**Participant Satisfaction with Program Logistics and Content**

**1. Satisfaction with Program Scheduling**

	Much too short	A little too short	Just right	A little too long	% Satisfied
a. Total length of program	8	10	6	0	25%
b. Amount of time spent with host family	6	13	5	0	21%
c. Amount of time spent with Americans of your own age	11	8	5	0	21%
d. Amount of time spent with fellow Soai students and Soai faculty	0	0	17	7	71%
e. Amount of time spent in classes, lectures, etc	0	0	7	17	29%
f. Amount of time spent in group social activities, recreation and sports	5	8	10	1	42%
g. Amount of time spent on group field trips and sightseeing	2	14	8	0	33%
h. Amount of free or personal time, rest time, etc.	5	7	11	1	46%

**2. Site and Host Family Location and Facilities**

	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Completely Satisfied	% Satisfied
i. Location of the Program: University of Northern Colorado, and town of Greeley	0	11	6	7	100%
j. Facilities on the U.N.C. Campus:	0	4	8	12	100%
k. Location of the host family's home	2	3	9	10	92%
l. Facilities and conditions in the host family's home	0	6	8	10	100%

**3. Program Content and Human Relations**

	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Completely satisfied	% Satisfied
m. Content of U.N.C courses and activities	6	12	5	1	75%
n. Types of group social and recreational activities, including travel and field trips	0	11	7	6	100%
o. Opportunities while still in Colorado to better understand your cross-cultural experience by discussing feelings etc.	21	3	0	0	12.5%
p. American teachers and staff at U.N.C.	0	5	5	14	100%
q. Relationships with American students	7	14	3	0	71%
r. Personalities and friendliness of host family members	0	1	8	15	100%
s. Your overall relationship with your host family	2	6	3	13	92%

Table E, Part 2, shows that students were almost universally satisfied with the location of the program, with the town of Greeley, with the U.N.C. campus, and with their individual host family's homes. These factors have surely contributed to the success of the program and argue favorably for a continued relationship between Soai and U.N.C.

Student evaluations of program content and human relations (Table E, Part 3) also resulted in high marks for social and recreational activities (100% were satisfied to some degree), and for the U.N.C. instructors and staff (100% were satisfied to some degree, and of those, 58% felt "completely satisfied").

The personalities and friendliness of host family members, and the quality of the relationship that developed with the host family also received outstanding evaluations from student participants. All participants responded that they were satisfied, and 62.5% of these felt completely satisfied, with host family members' personalities; only two students expressed dissatisfaction with their relationship with the host family, whereas 92% responded with approval and 54% of those were completely satisfied with the relationship that developed. Again we have evidence of the pivotal role played by the host family relationship in the success of the Soai Summer Program, and the U.N.C. International Student Services Office deserves praise for their role in producing such a high rate of satisfaction.

The program content area which received the lowest evaluation (87.5% dissatisfied) was "opportunities while still in Colorado to better understand your cross-cultural experience by discussing feelings, etc." This result points to a lack of formalized processing of the overseas experience while it is happening. Ideally, participants should have time for guided reflection on the cross-cultural experience as it is unfolding, with the leadership of experienced facilitators. Similarly, after they return to Japan, there seems to be no structured outlet (in the final two meetings of the "Gaikoku Jijo I" course, for example) for discussion of the U.S. experience and the many issues and affective responses it may have raised. We are not fulfilling our obligations to our students if we do not provide this kind of processing and follow-up once we have led them into a "brave new world" of cross-cultural experience, which can bring out strong feelings and can also lead to confusion and disorientation along with an increase in cultural awareness. To some extent, the way participants respond to their experiences is affected not only by their individual personalities and the qualities of the experience itself, but also by "the interpretation and guidance provided by significant others."<sup>9</sup>

### **5. Impact of the Program on Student Learning and Personal Development**

Overall, students felt a high degree (96%) of satisfaction with their own performance while faced with the challenge of the homestay and study abroad experience (see Table F). 75% were satisfied to one degree or other with their ability to communicate with their host family. However, when communication with other Americans in general was considered, the satisfaction level went down to 54%.

Looking at specific skills, only thirty percent felt that their English ability had improved during the three-week program, but this is hardly surprising considering the shortness of the sojourn. However, all felt they had learned something about American culture or history by being in the U.S., and 87.5% reported a positive change in feelings toward the United States.

More dramatic changes are shown in their evaluation of their own intercultural attitudes, skills, and awarenesses. The vast majority (twenty-three out of twenty-four) of the students reported that they had increased their understanding and appreciation of different cultures and racial, ethnic, and religious groups during the Summer Program, and had also improved their ability to recognize and solve cultural misunderstandings. (The results for each category were almost equally divided between those who had experienced “some change” and those who felt a “major change”). 92.5% reported a change in personal attitudes and ways of thinking as a result of the experience. Fifty percent said that it was a very important experience in their lives up to now, and another 46% felt it was one of their most important lifetime experiences; one student ranked it as “important”; none felt that it was not significant.

When asked to measure how the experience might have changed their future academic or employment goals, only 26% (seven students) reported a significant change, although an additional 58% (fourteen students) reported “some change”. However, two weeks after the end of the Summer Program is probably too early for students to make an accurate assessment of the program’s impact on their academic motivation and achievement, or on future job choice, etc. Only a longitudinal study could give an indication as to the long-term effects of the program on careers and attitudes, and show whether or not program participants do in fact come back to Japan more motivated to study because of their overseas experience.

Other questions in this section attempted to measure the depth of a student’s cross-cultural experience. Most research on study abroad programs involving American college students has concluded that short programs (under three to six months) had little

measurable impact on attitudes such as worldmindedness and ethnocentrism, or on the eventual career directions of the American participants. However, in interviews and questionnaires, participants usually reported some impact on their personal development and maturation.<sup>10</sup> Cornelius Grove, Director of the A.F.S. Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning, cites one month as the shortest significant length of time for a homestay "because it is unlikely that most young people can become actively functioning members of a new family in less time than that."<sup>11</sup> Considering the short length of the Soai Summer Program, and the lack of true immersion, perhaps not too much should be expected in terms of personal growth. But how strong and how different of an experience was it for the Japanese participants, and how emotionally involved did they become with people they met in the host country?

Adler argues that culture shock "can be an important aspect of culture learning, self-development, and personal growth."<sup>12</sup> If the degree of culture shock is a measure of the depth of a cross-cultural experience, then Soai students did not show evidence of having had a profound encounter with American culture. Fourteen of the twenty-four students (58%) reported experiencing no homesickness or culture shock while in the U.S.A., and only nine (37.5) said they experienced a little. No one reported strong homesickness or culture shock, although five students (21%) felt rather strong reentry shock after coming back to Japan, two felt it moderately, and ten "a little." The number claiming no feelings of reentry shock or disorientation on return was only 21% (five students).

Since the sojourn was so short, it can be hypothesized that students remained in the "honeymoon" or contact phase of the cross-cultural transition experience, which is characterized by feelings of euphoria and excitement,<sup>13</sup> for most or all of their stay in the U.S. Perhaps they only began to feel the impact of the experience after their return to Japan, when contrasts between the two cultures were brought home, so to speak. 58% of the participants reported feeling moderate or strong surprise at their own reactions to the overseas experience, which indicates a possible realignment of frame of reference, a typical result of effective cross-cultural encounters. This is supported by the data previously mentioned on changes in personal attitudes and ways of thinking, where nearly all students reported some change (15) or even a major change (7).

The strength of affective responses to the host culture is shown in the data on "degree of closeness in relationship to host family": 67% of the students reported having had a "very close" relationship with the host family, and another five students (21%) actually said that they became as close to the host family as to their own family in Japan. Three

students (12.5%) considered the relationship to have been only “close”; none said it was not close or only somewhat close. Again, the Homestay experience emerges as the critical contact point between Soai students and American culture, and it was probably the most immersive aspect of the sojourn. (A 1979 study by Pelowski of students from the Erie College for Women found that the nature of the host family relationship was the most significant factor in determining the success of the overseas experience.)<sup>14</sup> Relationships with Americans outside the host family seem to have had considerably less impact or depth, perhaps because most of the time away from the host family was spent either in class or in other organized activities together with fellow Soai students and teachers. According to Grove, immersion is a key factor in the success of an overseas homestay experience, and too much time spent with peer group members undermines students’ “motivation to become deeply involved with host nationals.”<sup>15</sup> Other researchers support his claim: “When students who already constitute a peer group at home go abroad together, the group can function as an inhibiting force in interpersonal development because of carryover of peer group pressure from home to host culture, and, perhaps, because it serves as a retreat from growth producing experiences in the new environment.”<sup>16</sup>

**TABLE F**  
**Self-reports of Personal Development and Impact of Program**

**1. Student assessment of own learning and performance**

	Quite dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Completely satisfied	% Satisfied
a. Own overall performance during the Homestay/Study experience	0	1	1	10	12	96%
b. Own ability to communicate with host family	2	6	7	5	4	75%
c. Own ability to communicate with other Americans	0	11	8	4	1	54%
	Little or no change	Some change	Major change	% Experiencing change		
d. Progress in English knowledge and skills	17	7	0	30%		
e. Amount of knowledge gained about US customs, history, etc.	0	17	7	100%		
f. Increased understanding and appreciation of different cultures, nationalities, races and religions	1	11	12	96%		
g. Ability to recognize and solve cultural misunderstandings	1	12	11	96%		
	No change	Became more negative	Became slightly more positive	Became much more positive		
h. Change in personal feelings about the United States	3	0	6	15		

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**2. Depth of Experience**

	No change	Negative change	Became closer	Became much closer	
a. Closer friendships with other Soai students in the summer program?	0	0	10	14	
	Not close	Somewhat close	Close	Very close	As close as own family
b. Degree of closeness in relationship with host family	0	0	3	16	5
	None	Only casual relationships	One or two close relationships	A few close relationships	Several very close relationships
c. Number and closeness of relationships formed with Americans of own age group	2	4	12	5	1
	Did not	Only a Little	Moderate	Rather strong	Extreme
d. To what degree did you experience homesickness and/ or culture shock during the stay in the U.S.?	14	9	1	0	0
e. To what degree did you experience some disorientation or "reentry shock" during the few weeks after returning to Japan?	5	10	2	5	2
f. To what extent did you feel surprised at your own reactions to the whole Homestay/Study experience?	2	8	8	6	0

**3. Overall impact of the program**

	Little or no change	Some change	Major change	% Experiencing significant change
a. To what extent do you think your personal attitudes and way of thinking changed?	2	15	7	92%
b. To what extent do you think your future study and employment goals may have changed?	3	14	7	85.5%
	Not significant	Important	Very important	One of my most important lifetime experiences
c. How important or significant do you think this experience has been to you personally?	0	1	12	11
	Would not recommend	Would recommend	Would recommend strongly	
d. Would you recommend next year's Soai Summer Program to your classmates?	0	8	16	

**6. Post-sojourn Attitude Survey**

A successful cross-cultural encounter "should result in the movement of personality and identity to a new consciousness of values, attitudes, and understandings."<sup>17</sup> A list of fifty subjective True-False questions was intended both to gauge student feelings and attitudes about the program, in support of other more objective sections of the questionnaire, and to measure the impact of the experience on their self-awareness, their cultural awareness, their view of the world, and their opinion of the host country. The process of



completing the questionnaire also gave students an opportunity to *reflect* on their own personal development and attitudes, and how they may have changed as a result of their three weeks in a small town far away. Reflection is an essential aspect of the intercultural experience which does not seem to be explicitly provided for in this program.

We have no pre-departure data for comparison, and the questions are for the most part general ones, rather than dealing with specific attitudes or cases. Nevertheless I believe the results are very revealing as an indicator of what students themselves felt they had experienced. They show that even in the short space of three weeks, some new doors had been opened in young minds, some strong affective reactions had occurred, and some potentially profound changes had been initiated for most participants. The changes reported are consistent with the prediction that college students like ours, who are most likely at the stage of personal autonomy called the "other-dependent level" before departure, will be more likely to view the experience in terms of positive change than will those who have already progressed to the stage of "inner dependence".<sup>18</sup> Other research also suggests that a first time cross-cultural experience will be "more likely to produce personal growth than to increase in-depth cultural and global understanding."<sup>19</sup> Whether the personal changes which students have experienced will persist after their return to Japan, and in what direction they may develop, remains to be seen.

In this report, the questions have been grouped differently than in the original questionnaire, to focus on various aspects of student response to the experience. Part one deals with cultural awareness and openness, and tolerance or broadmindedness towards the culturally different. All participants said that they had become more interested in meeting different kinds of people, and all but two felt that they had learned to relate to people of culturally different backgrounds during the summer program, although 25% still felt uncomfortable when meeting people who were very different. 96% felt they had become more aware of other people and the world, but a similar question on awareness of politics and world issues received only 33% agreement, as would be predicted at their starting maturity level of "other-dependence."

83% of the students accepted the idea of cultural relativity by agreeing that different cultures have different values which have validity within that culture; 92% felt that they had become more tolerant of different people and different ways of thinking after the summer abroad. They accepted that there are differences in Japanese and American ways of thinking, while at the same finding enjoyment in learning about new customs (100% agreement) and sharing their own culture with Americans (83% agreement). All but one stu-

dent seemed open to another overseas experience.

The cross-cultural experience can provide a new perspective through which individuals become more aware of their own culture by seeing it in contrast to another. Three quarters of the Soai students in the 1992 Summer Program agreed that they had become more aware of Japanese values and culture because of their stay in the U.S.A., and 88% came to look Japan and the Japanese people in a new way. Surprisingly, all but two students agreed that they had seen negative aspects of their home country after their return. Half of the students expressed a continued personal preference for Japanese customs and values, but the other half disagreed, which seems to indicate a significant, if perhaps temporary, change in in cultural orientation.

The questions in part two are concerned with various aspects of learning, skills development, and self-knowledge, whereas the next section considers changes in self-confidence and independence (this could be viewed as an aspect of personal development resulting from increased self-knowledge). These are the areas where we would predict the greatest amount of change for individuals at this level of maturity and in this brief a program. All students felt that learning which would not have occurred in Japan took place as a result of the overseas experience, although only 75% agreed that this learning would be useful in later life. All felt challenged by the experience, and 58% felt different about themselves after the summer, but only a third found this change reflected in reevaluation of future plans.

Concerning specific skills, 79% said that they had learned about how to communicate with people. The same number felt more confident about using English, although it seems that an equal number were disappointed in their actual ability to communicate with Americans in English; perhaps this gap will lead to the heightened motivation to study which one faculty member hoped for.

Personal development and maturation is a result of "moving from equilibrium through disequilibrium toward a new equilibrium"<sup>20</sup> as we have the experience of facing challenge, change, and the unknown. The majority of student participants felt increased confidence in their ability to deal with people (67%) and with challenging situations (96%). 62.5% felt they had become more independent, and an even larger number (79%) reported gains in autonomy (making decisions and relying on own judgement). This increased independence was supported by the fact that 71% of the students agreed that they would prefer to travel abroad independently in the future, rather than in the protective atmosphere of a group.

Questions in part four dealt specifically with participants' attitudes towards the U.S.A., and those in part five were intended to ascertain how profound an experience the students had had: were they closely in contact with the host culture and strongly affected by it, or were they having *a basically Japanese experience in the vicinity of American events*<sup>21</sup> due to lack of true immersion in the host culture? Most participants recognized that life in Colorado was different than in Japan (83%), that American people were different from Japanese (67%), and that the ways of thinking were very different (96%) in the two countries. However, most were not surprised by the reality of their experience of American life, as compared to their expectations (62.5%) or to images and stereotypes learned from the media or in school (79%). The fact that pre-existing concepts of the U.S. were not apparently challenged or shaken by the actual sojourn experience implies to me that the stay was too short for students to really know the culture and grasp its complexities and the extent of its differences from Japanese culture. The fact that students were short-term visitors, cushioned by their own peer group, kept them from being full participants in the host culture; only 25% of the students reported spending more time with Americans than with the other Japanese in their group.

On the personal and affective level, close contacts were apparently made through the homestay experience. 75% of the students felt able to share their personal feelings with the host family. All but one student claimed to be able to understand American's feelings and behavior, and all "liked American people in general" and liked them more than before the program. However, as mentioned before, only 48% felt that their friendships with Americans were "of lasting value."

Students seemed to have had mixed feelings about leaving the U.S.A. at the end of the program. 83% reported that they did not want to go home, yet 79% said they were glad to get back to Japan and the familiar society of friends and family. All said they would like to visit the United States again, and all but two students were open to the possibility of living there in the future. None reported any negative feelings about the U.S., which is evidence that they were indeed still in the "honeymoon" phase of cross-cultural contact, where everything seems novel and exciting.

**TABLE G**  
**Post-Sojourn Participant Attitude Survey**

**1. Cultural Awareness and Tolerance of Difference**

TRUE	%	FALSE	%	
J* E** T***		J E T		
7+15=22	92%	1+1=2	8%	2. I learned to understand and relate to people from different cultural backgrounds than my own.
8+16=24	100%	0		30. I became interested in meeting new and different kinds of people.
3+3=6	25%	5+13=18	75%	43. I felt uncomfortable when I met people who were very different from me.
8+15=23	96%	0+1=1	4%	6. I became more aware of other people and the world around me.
1+7=8	33%	7+9=16	67%	48. I became more aware of politics and world issues.
7+13=20	83%	1+3=4	17%	25. People in different countries have different values, and those values are okay for that country.
7+15=22	92%	1+1=2	8%	47. I feel that I became more tolerant and understanding of other peoples and their way of thinking.
8+15=23	96%	0+1=1	4%	31. The Japanese way of thinking and the American way are very different.
7+13=20	83%	1+3=4	17%	44. I enjoyed sharing Japanese culture with my American friends and family.
8+16=24	100%	0		49. It was fun and interesting to learn about different customs, food, music, and ways of doing things.
8+10=18	75%	0+6=6	25%	19. I became more aware of my own values and culture by learning about America.
8+13=21	88%	0+3=3	12%	21. I came to look at my country and its people in a new way.
6+16=22	92%	2+0=2	8%	24. After I came back to Japan, I noticed many things here that I did not like.
5+7=12	50%	3+9=12	50%	10. Japanese values and customs are the best for me.
0+1=1	4%	8+15=23	96%	18. I don't want to visit other foreign countries.

\*J=Number of responses from Japanese Department students

\*\*E=Number of responses from English Department students

\*\*\*T=Total number of students with this response

## 2. Self-Knowledge, Learning, and Skills Development

TRUE J E T	%	FALSE J E T	%	
8+16=24	100%	0		3. The Homestay/Study program gave me a chance to learn things that I wouldn't have learned in my home country.
7+11=18	75%	1+5=6	25%	23. I learned skills and information that will be useful in life.
3+16=19	79%	5+0=5	21%	1. I learned more about how to communicate with people in general.
4+10=14	58%	4+6=10	42%	16. After the homestay/study program, I felt different about myself.
0		8+16=24	100%	12. I did not feel especially challenged by the experience.
1+7=8	33%	7+9=16	67%	45. After the Homestay/Study experience, I felt confused about my own goals and future plans.

## 3. Self-confidence and Independence

7+16=23	96%	1+0=1	4%	5. When I first arrived in the U.S.I felt a little scared, but I overcame my fears.
3+13=16	67%	5+3=8	23%	7. I gained confidence in my ability to deal with people.
8+15=23	96%	0+1=1	4%	9. I learned how to deal with new and difficult situations.
7+9=16	67%	1+7=8	33%	32. I often needed to get advice and reassurance from classmates and teachers.
1+0=1	4%	7+16=23	96%	39. I seldom discussed my experience with other Soai students or teachers.
7+10=17	71%	1+6=7	29%	11. I felt more confident about communicating in a foreign language.
5+12=17	71%	3+4=7	29%	26. I was disappointed in my ability to communicate with Americans in English.
6+9=15	62.5%	2+7=9	37.5%	13. This experience helped me to become a more independent person.
6+13=19	79%	2+3=5	21%	14. I learned how to make decisions and follow my own judgement.
3+7=10	42%	5+9=14	58%	20. I felt rather negative about my own abilities and personal strengths.
6+11=17	71%	2+5=7	29%	35. Next time I go abroad, I would like to go by myself rather than with a group.

#### 4. Specific Attitudes about the USA

TRUE J E T	%	FALSE J E T	%	
8+16=24	100%	0		4. As a result of the Program, I came to like Americans more.
8+16=24	100%	0		37. I liked American people in general.
0		8+16=24	100%	8. I had some negative feelings about the United States after the Homestay Program.
7+14=21	88%	1+2=3	12%	15. I was very attracted to some aspects of American values and lifestyle.
0+4=4	17%	8+12=20	83%	17. American customs were very difficult to understand.
8+15=23	96%	0+1=1	4%	31. The Japanese way of thinking and the American way are very different.
8+16=24	100%	0		22. I'd like to visit the U.S. again in the future.
0+2=2	8%	8+14=22	92%	29. I don't want to live in the United States.

#### 5. Depth and Positiveness of the Experience

2+2=4	17%	6+14=20	83%	27. Living in Colorado was not really much different from living in Japan.
4+11=15	62.5%	4+5=9	37.5%	36. Life in the U.S.A. was just as I expected.
2+3=5	21%	6+13=19	79%	42. The reality of American life was quite different than the images I had learned from movies, TV, books, and school.
2+4=6	25%	6+12=18	75%	34. I spent more time with American people than with members of the Soai group or other Japanese.
4+4=8	33%	4+12=16	67%	41. The Americans I met were not basically different from people in Japan.
4+6=10	42%	6+8=14	58%	38. The friendships I made in America were close and of lasting value.
8+15=23	96%	0+1=1	4%	28. I was able to understand Americans' personal feelings and behavior.
8+10=18	75%	0+6=6	25%	33. By the end of the homestay, I felt I could really share my true feelings with my homestay family.
5+14=19	79%	3+2=5	21%	40. I was really glad to get back to Japan, and to my friends and family there.
7+13=20	83%	1+3=4	17%	46. At the end of the Homestay/Study Program, I didn't want to go home.

#### 6. Preparation

5+10=15	62.5%	3+6=9	37.5%	50. I felt that my studies at Soai University prepared me well for the Homestay/Study experience.
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## **Recommendations**

All the students surveyed said that they would recommend next year's Soai Summer Program to their classmates; sixteen of these said they would recommend it strongly. The students were quite satisfied with the location of the program, with the U.N.C. campus, staff and instructors, and with their individual host family experiences. These results support a continued relationship between Soai and U.N.C. However, it may be desirable to modify some aspects of the program in order to better meet students' needs and help them to get the most from their cross-cultural experience. The following are specific suggestions which I hope will be considered by Soai's Committee on International Exchanges, and by the International Student Services Office at U.N.C.

1. Pre-departure Training: Concerned instructors need to consider how the to curriculum might be revised to target specific areas where students felt particularly unprepared (eg. how to communicate with the homestay family). Also I feel that there should be more activities focusing on the development of general communication skills and cross-cultural awareness before the students leave for the United States.

2. Increasing opportunities for contact with non-Japanese of the same age group: This problem has already been discussed above, and there are practical reasons for it, but we need to look for new approaches. One possibility is to combine Soai students and other foreign students in English language classes, if there are other foreign students on campus following a similar schedule, rather than putting Soai students together. Other data indicates that students felt they spent too much time with their Soai group, although that may also have been comfortable and supportive. They need increased contacts with non-Japanese in order to get more out of the cross-cultural experience. As far as opening new ways of thinking and exposing Soai students to new values and ideas, it makes no difference whether the contacts are with Americans or students from other countries.

Another possibility is to see if there are American students at U.N.C. studying Japanese language. If so, a one-to-one peer tutoring program might be developed. This would give students a chance to develop the same kind of close personal relationship with someone of their own age group as they have done so successfully with the host family.

3. Length of Program and Allocation of Time: Information from the questionnaire (see Table E) indicates that many students want more time for sightseeing and with the host family, and less for other activities such as classes. Also, most students seemed to want a longer program, and said they were sorry when it came time to return to Japan. It

might be possible to lengthen the program to one month, which one expert considers as the minimum period for an effective homestay experience.<sup>22</sup> The additional week could be used for more field trips and spent with the host family.

4. Content of courses at U.N.C.: A quarter of the students said the content of U.N.C. courses was quite different than they expected. We need to find out why, and whether changes need to be made in the U.N.C. course. I was not a participant in the program, and my only information comes from the course outline and from students' comments, on the questionnaire or privately. However, I feel that there may be room in the curriculum while at U.N.C. for more activities which involve cross-cultural awareness and skills-building, and which provide opportunities for students to process and reflect on their experience while it is taking place. Such activities might include discussion, journal writing, values clarification exercises, and cross-cultural simulations.

5. Debriefing: As has been mentioned earlier, we are not fulfilling our obligation to our students if, having started them off on a journey of personal and cross-cultural discovery, we do not then provide ways for them to reflect on and process their experiences, and ideally to continue the process of self-development and cultural awareness which has been set in motion. After returning to Japan, this year's participants were asked to write short essays on their experience, and this is a valuable activity but I do not feel it is adequate. Ideally, the "Gaikoku Jijo" class should not end in October, but should continue for the rest of the year, with additional credits given. The group now has a rapport built up from their shared experience in Colorado, and doors have been opened in their minds. It is an ideal situation to carry on with more advanced activities in cross-cultural training.

## Conclusion

My own reading on the impact of Study Abroad programs on American university students indicates that there are three major program variables which influenced program effectiveness: 1) length of sojourn, 2) depth of contact with host nationals, and 3) types of activities engaged in by the students during the sojourn. Participants' individual personalities and the choice of host country also seemed to effect outcomes, but these are variables which are difficult to quantify or control. Most of these studies of U.S. study abroad programs support the conclusion that programs of less than six months duration had little measurable long-term impact on participants' attitudes or eventual career choices.<sup>23</sup> However, subjective reports from interviews indicated that participants in U.S.



Study Abroad programs generally felt that they had been affected significantly by the experience in terms of their personal development.

Soai's Summer Program is nowhere near the optimum six month minimum length recommended by Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, and just short of of Grove's one month minimum for homestays. However, it may be hypothesized that since the racial, ethnic, and social composition of Japan is considerably more homogeneous than that of the United States, Japanese students may be more strongly affected by even a short sojourn abroad than are their American counterparts, particularly when that sojourn incorporates the key contact experience of living with an American host family. Also, Soai students are probably at the "other-dependent" level of Piaget and Inhelder's model of personal social development, and research suggests that individuals at this stage are more likely to be strongly, and positively, influenced by a cross-cultural experience than those at the more advanced "inner-dependent" level.<sup>24</sup>

Further research on program impact on students, and the relative importance of different variables, needs to incorporate both pre-and post program attitude testing, a larger sample, and control groups in order to explore these hypotheses.

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### **Notes**

- 1) Thanks to Miyuki Miyaji of Canadian Academy, Kobe, for translating my original English language questionnaire into Japanese, thus ensuring more accurate student responses.
- 2) Professor T. Gotoda, Soai University; personal communication.
- 3) Professor S. Komatsu, Soai University; personal communication.
- 4) Professor T. Gotoda, Soai University; personal communication.
- 5) Professor K. Kitazaki, Soai University; personal communication.
- 6) Professor Y. Maeda, Soai University; personal communication.
- 7) Professor K. Kitazaki, Soai University; personal communication.
- 8) Professor K. Kitazaki, Soai University; personal communication.
- 9) Adler, p. 17
- 10) See Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver for an excellent survey of the research on U.S. students abroad. Individual studies are also cited in the bibliography, below.
- 11) Grove, p. 2.
- 12) Adler, p. 14.
- 13) Adler, p. 16.
- 14) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 129.

- 15) Grove, p. 2.
- 16) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 107.
- 17) Adler, p. 15.
- 18) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 129.
- 19) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 75.
- 20) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 125.
- 21) Thanks to Milton Bennett of the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon, for introducing me to this psychological concept in a lecture in July, 1992.
- 22) Grove, p. 2. Other sources suggest six to twelve months as the optimum stay. See Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 63.
- 23) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 63. One study did document improved academic performance after students returned from the study abroad program, compared to before it and to a control group.
- 24) Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver, p. 124, 129.

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