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2016-17 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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## The Importance of Cultural Exchange

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December 1, 2016

## The Importance of Cultural Exchange

The ginkgo trees lining the front walkway of Aoyama Gakuin have finally started to shed their yellow leaves, marking the beginning of winter in Tokyo. I have now been living in Japan for over three months, but it feels like no time has passed at all. I thought I would be used to living here by now, but every day I discover new places, meet new people, and learn new things about the Japanese culture and language. Every moment here has helped me to grow as a person, but having the opportunity to meet and talk with the local people has been the most valuable part of my study abroad experience.

After I first arrived in Japan, I held a lot of misconceptions about the Japanese way of life. Likewise, many of my Japanese classmates have confided their ideas about American culture to me, many of which were hilariously misconstrued. The discussions I've had with my friends debunking these preconceived notions of ours have helped put into perspective how important cultural dialogue and exchange between countries really is, especially now with the current state of global affairs. One conversation can have the power to alter our perceptions of an entire nation of people, and that is both terrifying and empowering.

When I decided to study in Japan for a year, my main goal was to increase my fluency in Japanese. I never expected my passion for the language to evolve into a passion for diplomatic relations, but my experiences here have shown me that I have the power to impact the lives of others simply by sharing a piece of myself and my life to them, just as they have the power to impact mine. By sharing our cultural identities, we can achieve a deeper understanding of the world, foster appreciation of our differences, and erase our biases.

I hope to continue to learn and share as often as I can for the remainder of my stay.

Kelly