

Experience report

Exchange semester at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business

Nagoya, Japan

Winter semester 2022/23

FB02 - Master in Business Administration

Summary

NUCB is a business school, teaching with the Harvard Case Method Format, very different to our academic orientation. I would recommend looking elsewhere if you are more analytically oriented. That means the courses are designed for potential future managers who don't need in-depth knowledge of each topic but should have a fundamental understanding. All accommodation options that are organized by the university are good value for money around €650 p.m.. Per month expenses, accumulate to about €2,000 for me, which includes trips each month, parties, restaurant visits, and rent. Nagoya is centrally located in Japan and thus an excellent starting point for trips. Especially the budget airline "peach", the bus network of "Japan Bus" and "Willer Express", and the train network make it easy to explore Japan, because the city itself offers only limited experiences. In total I spent about €12,000.

If you are interested in going to Nagoya, you can contact me via email: julius.odenbreit@icloud.com and I gladly help you with preparations or any other questions related to the exchange in Nagoya. You will find my personal pros and cons and conclusion about my stay at the end of the document.

Preparations for going abroad

I will skip the application process of Goethe University and start with the requirements of NUCB. Most importantly, you will receive a fact sheet listing documents and deadlines for your application with NUCB, making the process transparent and comprehensive.

Application with NUCB and entering Japan

I have yet to experience the level of coordination that NUCB offers their students. In total there were three different Zoom sessions in which students were explained the procedures at NUCB and entering Japan. Overall, although the procedures might seem overwhelming at first, it really is not. The overviews, timelines and different documents required will be sent by NUCB and make your planning and the needed information clear. Because the different authorities need some time to process your application, I would advise you not to lose too much time when asked to submit/ prepare documents.

For the application to NUCB, you need a range of different documents. NUCB will send most of the documents, you only need to fill in. Other information, as a bank statement (a signed paper by your bank showing that you have deposits more than I think €5.800) you will need to prepare yourself.

The documents I needed for NUCB entailed: (i) NUCB application form, (ii) bank statement, (iii) certificate of eligibility (a questionnaire to fill in), (iv) color photograph for student ID, (v) CV, (vi) proof of your English proficiency, (vii) motivation letter, (viii) passport ID, (ix) information about your scholarship status (if you currently receive a scholarship), (x) current transcript of records.

Visa

If you managed to be accepted by NUCB, which is apparently only a formality, you must prepare for the Visa application. The website of the Japanese [consulate](#) in Frankfurt has all the updated information. With the following documents I successfully applied for the visa: (i) Visa application form to enter Japan, (ii) certificate for completion of registration to the ERS system, (iii) Fast Track Confirmation – the confirmation that you will register and comply with the requirements for [Visit Japan Web](#) (about one week before departure you should fill out this questionnaire), (iv) your status declaration – issued by NUCB for you, (v) certificate of eligibility – sent to you by NUCB, (vi) Passport, (vii) vaccination confirmation – for COVID-19, and (viii) a photograph for your visa – be careful the size dimensions of the picture are different to the ones of German passports, if you get visa pictures specify that for your photographer. The process took about two weeks for me. Some steps might change because COVID-restrictions are easing, for example to enter Japan, there are currently no quarantine requirements.

Don't be afraid to apply for Japan because it might seem overwhelming. NUCB is really helping you a lot with onboarding and entering Japan, I have the feeling more than most of other universities will do for you.

University-related

General information

The Nagoya University of Commerce and Business is a business school. There are two parts of the university, the graduate campus is located in [Fushimi](#), the undergraduate campus in [Nisshin](#). Overall, NUCB aims to educate future or current manager, as they call it: “educate managers who possess frontier spirit”. Consequently, the courses taught, are related much more to managerial decision making, or marketing. If you are looking for finance, accounting, or economics courses, you have a limited choice of maybe one or two. Our university requires to take a minimum of seven courses per semester. Each course takes only four days to complete and will give you three credits at Goethe university (check for the minimum requirements, which might change [here](#)). By taking a multitude of courses, you will gain insights into different topics. Yet, because of the four-day courses, deep insights and comprehensive understanding will not be gained. Furthermore, because you are heavily engaged with your class in discussions, you will hear different opinions, yet real knowledge and experience from the professor is not transferred. Most of the students are between 21 and 25 and bring limited experience and knowledge to the class. The course design initiated by Harvard University is targeting individuals with at least three years of working experience. However, this design is brought as well to the Master in Management (MiM) courses at NUCB, which you will probably choose most of the courses from, and which does not have requirements for prior working experience.

The international orientation of the university brings in many different nationalities and the class size of 20 to 70 students allows to make a lot of contact with all students and the professors, too. In several instances, the professors organized dinner together or students went out after the last day of class and organized their own parties.

Overall, the university is very strict and organized with limited room for flexibility or understanding for individual inquiries. For example, if they mess up your course selection, initially giving you the information to select a certain course which turns out later to be not available to you, they assist you only as far as their strict rules allow not considering the individual case at hand. You must sign an attendance sheet online every day, with each day having a unique attendance code. If you miss or misspell the code and

don't realize in time, you will fail the class or be heavily punished in your grade for it if not for the professor to send confirmation upon your request to the administration. Community rules for each residence are strict too. Besides no alcohol, you are not allowed to bring outside guest like friends that visit you during your stay. Misconduct will be punished with the threat of being expelled from the dormitory. However, the administration will always be responsive to your request and each day that you go to university, you have the possibility to talk to them directly. In general, the tone of communication was sometimes very harsh, to a degree which you would not encounter in Germany.

Course structure

As an exchange student, you are eligible to choose courses from either the MiM program (Master in Management), or the MBA program of the university. MiM courses are weekday courses from Tuesday to Friday. MBA courses are weekend courses on consecutive weekends on Saturday and Sunday. For MBA courses, you will receive lunch, whereas for MiM courses you have to organize it yourself.

Contrary to how I know exchange semesters, you will not enter a class of Japanese but you will be in a class of many different nationalities. That is because the Japanese's English level is not high enough. Your class will consist of MiM/ MBA students with different nationalities, exchange students, or double degree students.

Teaching in the Harvard case method format

Contrary to lectures as you know them from Goethe university, NUCB teaches with case studies, which you pay for at the end of your semester. My bill for the semester was about €300. Commonly, you will receive two case studies per day which will be discussed in class. By discuss, I mean class discussion, the professor serves the function of a moderator and will only occasionally give his opinion or input. To varying degrees, professors introduce frameworks or explain topics which must be related to the case in the following class discussion. Because the discussions are not profound, no worries if you don't have in-depth knowledge on the topic.

You receive the cases around two weeks before the course starts and have time to "prepare" them. For reading, the professor assigns questions, around four per case, which are supposed to help understand the case. Some professors use these questions during class discussions, others don't.

Each day before the class, you have 40 minutes of group discussion, in which the group is supposed to discuss the case, ask questions to each other, and facilitate understanding of the varying topics. Some students never showed up to the discussions.

Some professors give additional group questions during the class, which must then be prepared in 20-30 minutes and subsequently be presented in front of the class.

Evaluation and exams

The evaluation criteria are the following:

- Class participation: mostly around 50% - 60% of your overall score. The more you raise your hand, the better your grade will be, contents are oftentimes less of importance. Because of the class size, some professors have a tally sheet and for each contribution, you receive a mark. In other instances, they don't and you are dependent on the professors remembering you.
- Final reports: mostly around 40% of your grade. The tasks you will have to complete are wide ranging. From essays with questions, to cases analyses or "choose a topic and write an essay" or

“what have you learned in the course” the imagination of the professor is the limiting factor. The tasks are not like a seminar thesis.

- Pre-assignments: Some professors enforce class preparation with pre-assignments. You will need to answer questions relating to the case.
- Post-class assignments: Some professors want give students who talk less during class the opportunity to answer questions post course. Those are short questions which are counted as one class contribution.
- Case exams: You have varying time during class to write a case analysis.
- Exams: Some questions relating to the learning of the course that you will need to answer within the course, around 30 minutes and shorter than case exams.

Because your grade depends on class participation, you have to make an impression on the professor, not only by comments but also by going to see the professor after class for example. If you don't belong to the top 10% to make an impression, you run the risk of getting a C and there will never be an objective evaluation criterion, because your grade depends on the professor's subjective evaluation of you. With 70 students in a class, there is the risk of him not remembering you and just assigning you either B or C. Because of “privacy concerns” the administration does give you the email address of the professor. Hence, there is no feedback about your grade and the professors don't run the risk of really having to justify your grade to anyone.

Accommodation

You don't have to look for your own place, the university organizes student apartments in three different places. I am not so sure how you will be allocated to a residence. If you have a preference, I would suggest to message NUCB as early as possible and give them strong reasons for your preference.

Higashiyama

The first student dormitory is located in [Higashiyama](#). This is an upscale living neighborhood, for Japanese standards. The dormitory accommodates around 40 students, each having their own room with fridge, desk, chair and bathroom. Depending on the room, you will have a balcony. The kitchen and washing machine must be shared by all the students. The rooms are very spacious, good looking and modern. This residence will serve you breakfast buffet in a shared dining room from Tuesday to Saturday. It takes around 40 minutes to the campus, walk – subway – walk. Your exit station is [Fushimi](#). To the center of Nagoya, [Sakae station](#), it takes around 25 minutes.

Compared to the other dormitories, Higashiyama offers shared facilities as a cinema room, a small gym, dining room, kitchen and seminar room. Because they serve you breakfast each day, you will have plenty of opportunities to socialize with other students, which makes it easy to make contact and friends.

The dormitory fee is about €780 p.m. for 4.5 months with the exchange rate at my time. Prices are like to be higher now, as I heard that for some double degree students which stay a year, the second term rent was increased.

- Rent p.m.: JPY76,500
- Administrative (entrance) fee: JPY 10,000
- Utilities p.m.: JPY 9,250
- Common service p.m.: JPY 3,000
- School Service Charge for Fall 2022: JPY 35,000

- Total was: JPY494,375

Chiyoda

This dormitory is centrally located in the area called [Chiyoda](#). It is a living and commercial area in Nagoya and around a 15-20 minutes' walk to Sakae station or the campus. Taking the subway, it only takes 10 minutes. Within five minutes by foot, there are ample of shops and the [Osu kannon](#) district, a busy area with many different shops, restaurants, and nice-looking streets. The rooms are less modern than in Higashiyama, there is no breakfast, but you have a one stove pot and a microwave to prepare food, and a washing machine. Overall, the rooms are smaller, still enough, and less modern compared to Higashiyama. There are no shared facilities in this dormitory.

Dormitory related payments per month are about €670 for 4.5 months:

- Deposit: JPY 30,000
- Rent p.m.: JPY61,500
- Administrative (entrance) Fee: JPY 22,500
- Utilities p.m.: JPY 9,250
- Common service p.m.: JPY 3,000
- School Service Charge for Fall 2022: JPY 35,000
- Total: JPY 419,375

Meito

This dormitory is in [Meito](#). Due to the closer proximity to the undergraduate campus compared to the above-mentioned accommodations, NUCB tries to send mostly undergraduate students here. It is my understanding that only if Chiyoda and Higashiyama are full, you will be assigned this residence. It takes around 50 minutes to an hour to reach the graduate campus and about 35 minutes to reach Sakae station.

The rooms are more modern and better furnished than Chiyoda, but less than Higashiyama and about the same size as the rooms in Chiyoda There is no breakfast, and you have your own one stove pot and microwave to prepare food. Besides, you have your own bathroom, desk, and chair. There is a common area where you can meet people and sit down for a chat. To my knowledge, your laundry room is shared.

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- Total: JPY 419,375

Life outside of the university

Nagoya is centrally located in Japan, making it a great starting point for exploring Japan. Peach aviation, a budget airline brings you to many exciting locations and is oftentimes cheaper than the Shinkansen (Bullet Train) and much faster than taking the bus. Per semester you will receive five 20% discount cards for the Shinkansen. Watch out for sales of peach aviation on their website, with hand luggage you can find return

flights for Hokkaido for €60. [Willer bus](#) or [Japan bus](#) are alternatives to traveling with the train, slower but much cheaper.

Nagoya itself does not offer a lot to explore and you will find yourself oftentimes doing daytrips. However, its location compensates for not being the most exciting city. Within 5.5 hours by bus, you can reach Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka. Two-hour flights bring you to Hokkaido, Fukuoka, and Okinawa which is a Japanese tropical island south of Japan.

I highly recommend translating your driver's license. The benefit for Germans: you don't need an international driver's license, only a Japanese translation which you must inquire with the Japanese Automobile Federation [JAF](#). Pro tip: they will tell you in the office it will take you two weeks to process, but if you tell them you would like to leave within the next couple of days, they will process within two to three days. With the car, it is very easy to explore the surroundings and make some 4–5-day trips. Exciting areas are around mount Fuji, the central Alps, Wakayama, Nagano, Kagawa, or Okayama. Stay in so called Ryokans, traditional Japanese accommodations and oftentimes run by families.

When traveling, look on [booking.com](#) for travel support by the government. I don't know how long that support will last, but to combat the consequences of COVID-19, the government supports residents (you will receive a Japanese residence card) with vouchers and discounts on accommodations.

Lastly, for Japan, Google Maps is great for getting around. The service lists all the trains and buses that you need, oftentimes even the platform you have to go to for your trains. Constantly checking google maps requires data plans in Japan. I was very happy with [Sakura Mobile](#) who offer long term travel sim cards and different plans that you can choose from. You can easily inquire the sim card in Germany and send it to your first hotel, they will have it ready upon your arrival. With the long term sim cards, your contract runs for a minimum of three months, after which you can cancel any month.

Final remarks

There is a WhatsApp group for your exchange in Nagoya which is helpful for your preparations and entering Japan. Look on Facebook, they post updated links to the groups each semester if I am not mistaken. Look [here](#) for reference.

While staying in Japan, you will need to register national health insurance, which covers some 70% of all costs incurred for going to doctors etc. Depending on your risk aversion, you might not need additional German "Auslandskrankenversicherung".

For financing your stay, NUCB offers three different scholarships. First, the JASSO scholarship which is JPY 80,000 per month, paid in cash in the university. The requirements are GPA of 2.3 on the JASSO scale (whatever that means). Second, a housing scholarship of JPY 40,000 per month which is deducted from your housing payment you must transfer before coming to Japan. The requirements are JPA of 3.0 on the NUCB scale, minimum of three courses per term and attendance of at least 95%. Third, a housing scholarship of JPY 25,000 which is as well deducted from your housing payment. Requirements the same to the first housing scholarship, only your GPA needs to be only 2.0. NUCB will automatically apply for you for all the scholarships, but you can only receive one of them.

Pros

- The onboarding process NUCB offers is great. They guide you through the entire application process for NUCB, your visa application and the additional requirements for entering Japan.

- Regardless of the accommodation you will live in, they are all very good and you have everything you need.
- The international environment of NUCB is a great experience. The class was very international and diverse.
- The course structure of only four days during the week, every two weeks, allows you to have a lot of free time which you can use to explore Japan. Between two courses you can have 10 days without class.
- Contrary to Goethe University, you will improve your soft skills and dealing with people. Many different presentations, and discussions in smaller group force you to talk, even though you might not be too comfortable with a topic. You will improve your ability to self-present a lot, which can be very useful in future work environments.
- Japan is just an amazing country to explore and live in.

Cons

- For everyone with academic aspirations, this is the wrong place. The cases only allow for discussions without depth. Challenging topics which you must think about are rarely found. The word “quantitative” has probably never been used in NUCB before.
- The evaluation based on class participation is very subjective. Paired with a curve-grading, the more other students raise their hands, the more you need to speak to guarantee a good grade. Thus, lots of contents without value will be said in class.
- Discussions lack depth and without the professor explaining/ intervening (because he must foster class discussion) I was left wondering how this can be a master’s course.
- Honest preparation and work can only ensure limited success because of the questions for class discussions are not always known in advance.
- The syllabus is rarely a true indicator of what the contents of the class will look like and professors are not allocated according to their core competencies.
- Assignments are dull and oftentimes do not foster exploration of the contents. For some graded assignments, you must write a reflection essay telling what you have learned during class, which for the sake of your grade just feels like commending everything that you experienced during class.
- Every opportunity will be used for marketing purposes, which was too aggressive to me and sometimes portrayed a wrong picture of what actually happened. At the end of every course a class picture is taken. And once per semester, a photographer comes to a class and takes pictures and videos of the class. By agreeing to the terms and conditions, you allow the university to use every picture that was taken of you.
- Overall, I felt that the university is mainly self-serving in the quest to gain publicity, forgetting the students in the meantime.
- Because of the course structure, I don’t know if I could have a course transferred as seminar thesis. If you are looking to finalize your studies within four semesters and have not done your second seminar, which I think is required to register for your master thesis, then you better check with the examination office what to do.

Opinion

I found it oftentimes frustrating to be in class. Not only was it difficult for me to participate to the extent that is required to somehow guarantee a top grade, but I was baffled with the discussions allowed in a master's course. From plain wrong statements, which there were plenty of and not corrected by the

professor, to not ending dull discussions about inanities. Discussions are superficial and never academic. Only occasionally will professors ask you to state sources in your final reports. Although you will receive a notice that you must pay for each case that will be used in class, I was surprised to pay €300 for the semester. The grading is untransparent and not according to objective criteria like points in an exam. If the professor does not really remember you, your grade is can become a gamble between a B or C, because how does he remember the contributions of each of the 70 students. Due to “privacy concerns” you will not have the chance to contact the professor about anything and you can only talk to the administration. The grading system is the most frustrating part of my exchange in Japan. Thus, in this regard there might be other universities which make it easier for you to bring home good grades.

On the contrary, I think that my time at NUCB has taught me some valuable lessons. Speaking publicly in front of the class sometimes as a presentation with minimal preparation will not be taught at Goethe University. Defending your points in an open discussion certainly increases your ability to bring across concise arguments. In general, soft skills are much more important at NUCB and you will refine them a lot.

Outside of the university, I really enjoyed my stay in Japan. It is a unique country, staying true to its traditions. You will sometimes feel like it is still the Japan from the 60s and 80s. The culture you will experience in Japan is exceptional and I enjoyed every day of it. You will have plenty of opportunities to socialize with the other students who were all eager to have fun and make the most of their time in Japan. If you want an excellent read about staying in Japan look [here](#).

In conclusion, I am ambivalent if I would take the same decision. I think there are many exceptional countries which offer a better university or business school, if you are looking to experience a different style of teaching.