

Study report QTEM exchange semester at Waseda University – winter 2019/2020 – MIEEP

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INTRODUCTION

Having had the chance to visit Japan during my semester abroad in Beijing in my undergraduate studies, I always wanted to spend more time there and dive into the unique Japanese culture. The QTEM-program with the prestigious Waseda University in Tokyo as a partner university offered the perfect opportunity to do so. QTEM, which means “Quantitative Techniques of Economics and Management”, is a network of universities and corporate partners worldwide which aims at enabling students to study and work in at least three countries while focusing on improving their quantitative skills.

This report tries to cover all relevant topics related to a semester abroad at Waseda University. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me.

PREPARATION

At home

I can only recommend applying for the QTEM program and in particular for a semester abroad at Waseda University, Graduate School of Economics (GSE). Thanks to the separate application systems at Goethe University - one for QTEM and one for standard partnership universities - you have nothing to lose when applying for QTEM even if your QTEM application should not work out. However, from my experience, fewer MIEEP students have done the GMAT or GRE certification, which is a requirement for the QTEM application, and thus, your chances as a MIEEP student might be a little higher. Another advantage, besides being part of a worldwide student network, is that no additional application for Waseda University is necessary once your application for the semester abroad through Goethe University was successful and you got invited into the QTEM network.

Once you have been nominated for Waseda University, they will inform you about the next steps to take:

Housing application: You will receive information about housing in private dormitories as well as about housing in official dormitories of Waseda University. There are three different official dormitories of Waseda University; all withing close walking distance from the campus, however, you cannot choose in which one you would like to stay when applying. Nevertheless, in the housing questionnaire (=dormitory application form), which should be filled in around the beginning of June, you can state the budget you are willing to spend for housing and thus influence the type of dormitory you might get assigned. I put the maximum budget to increase my chances of getting a dormitory room and received a single room with my own toilet (but shared bathroom) in Waseda Hoshien. I was very happy with it even though, of course, it is pretty expensive (around 80,000 yen per month). Nevertheless, compared to other housing options in Tokyo I think it is absolutely worth it.

JASSO scholarship application: The JASSO Scholarship is a scholarship offered by the Japanese Student Services Organization to, among others, foreign students who temporarily study in Japan. In the 2019/2020 semester it consisted of a payment of 80,000 yen per month paid over a period of five months. Considering the almost not existing application effort (I only needed to hand in my transcript and the grading scale of Goethe University), this is a chance which should not be missed. Additionally, you can apply for the PROMOS scholarship of the DAAD which in the 2019/2020 semester consisted of 500 Euro per month plus 1.250 Euro for travel expenses. If you get both, the JASSO scholarship plus

the PROMOS scholarship, you probably will not receive the monthly payments of PROMOS, but you should still get the budget for travel expenses. This is how you can maximize your scholarships and finance your study abroad in Tokyo more easily.

Visa: Once you received the Certificate of Eligibility (COE) issued by the Japanese Government, which was sent to me by mail at the end of July, you can apply for your Student Visa at the Japanese Consulate in Frankfurt. This process is quite easy and approximately one week after the visa application you will get your passport back including your student visa with multiple entries. Later, when arriving at the airport in Japan you will receive your residence card and you can easily apply for a working permit in case you need it.

Book flights: In order to book your flights it might be useful to check the academic calendar of Waseda University online and to already book your flight back, because it is super cheap if you book it so much in advance. However, keep in mind that courses might finish earlier than the exam period indicated in the academic calendar. This was the case for me but I actually enjoyed being done with exams two weeks earlier than the official exam period indicated and thus, having some time to still do some things which I hadn't done so far.

In Japan

The general orientation meeting of Waseda University for incoming international students was quite early in September considering the fact that the lectures didn't start before the end of September. That is why I decided to skip the general orientation meeting and arrive in time for the orientation meeting of the Graduate School of Economics (GSE). For me it was the right decision as there was still enough time to get to know fellow students and to get all necessary administrative tasks done. Even though there really is a lot to do when arriving in Japan and the country is at least as bureaucratic as Germany, you will get enough help with moving into your dormitory, registering yourself at the Shinjuku city ward office, getting healthcare, making a phone contract, opening a Japanese bank account (which is necessary if you receive the JASSO scholarship), getting your student ID card, doing the course registration, and checking out all the student clubs of Waseda University.

Concerning **healthcare**, I suggest that you get a German health insurance for your stay abroad since the obligatory Japanese health insurance only covers 70% of the medical expenses. The obligatory Japanese health insurance costs for the whole stay, if I remember correctly, around 80 Euro when getting the student discount. You will receive the insurance bills to your dormitory via mail after you signed up for the insurance at the Shinjuku ward office and you can pay all bills together at any convenience store like a 7/11. When leaving earlier than initially planned and thus paid, you can get the overpaid insurance premiums back at the Shinjuku ward office at the end of your stay.

Concerning the **bank account** required for receiving the JASSO scholarship, you can either open it at Japan Post Bank or Resona Bank which both offer bank opening sessions at Waseda University at the beginning of the semester. However, you will need your personal seal for opening a bank account which you can get for cheap at Don Quixote or for a little more money at a suggested store by Waseda University. However, if you decide to do it at the suggested store it will take one day for the seal to be ready, so remember to do it in advance of the bank opening sessions. Furthermore, I recommend you to (additionally) get a credit card of, for instance, DKB in Germany since if you are an active customer (receiving 700 euro or more each month on your DKB bank account) you can withdraw money worldwide without being charged by DKB for it, which is quite handy.

Concerning the **mobile contract**, I suggest going to a "Big Camera" store in Shinjuku (where they can speak a little English) and ask for, for instance, the Mobile One contract by OTT for 6 months without cancellation fee. Then you can decide if you want to have only data or data plus voice. I only got data (1,5 GB) for just a little over 1000 yen per month which was really cheap compared to other contracts.

Generally, I recommend you to download Google translate with the Japanese language – it is always a great help, especially the camera (instant translation) function.

WASEDA UNIVERSITY AND COURSES

Besides Keio University, Waseda University is the most prestigious private university in Japan. Most professors at Waseda did their PHD abroad in Europe or the US and hence at least all professors I had could speak English very well. Nevertheless, the level and difficulty of the courses varied a lot! Furthermore, the course registration needs to be done after the first week of lectures and cannot be changed afterwards. This is in contrast to our German course registration system and for exchange students it is a real struggle because there are courses which are quite challenging (almost PHD level) plus a lot of work and if you choose a lot of these courses you won't have enough time to enjoy your semester abroad if you also aim at getting good grades. However, there are also courses which are below the difficulty level of Master courses at Goethe University. Therefore, if a course is not mentioned here but you would like to know how much work it will be, I suggest joining the facebook group "QTEM Tokyo student club" and just ask about the courses you are interested in. There are also some Japanese students in the group who might be very helpful. Each course has 2 Waseda credits which equal 5 ECTS at Goethe University and therefore, for the full semester workload of 30 ECTS at Goethe University you need to do six courses. As far as I know, but better confirm it with the examination office, the grading conversion by Goethe University is as follows: A+ = 1.0, A = 2.0, B = 3.0, C = 4.0, F = failed.

I took the following QTEM-courses for which the exact course outline can be found at the online syllabus of the GSE of Waseda University:

Decision Making Theory – by SHIMIZU, Kazumi

This is a fall quarter course, which means it is twice a week but therefore it only lasts until the end of November. Good professor, interesting topics, perfectly doable workload and difficulty and therefore, I highly recommend this course. The grade consists of one midterm, one final, and attendance.

Macroeconomics III (General Equilibrium) – by HAMANO, Masashige

This is also a fall quarter course with lectures twice a week plus a TA session once a week. Good professor and TA, but I heard that they often change from one year to the next. Very high workload and even though the syllabus sounds like the content we learned in Frankfurt in *Fundamentals of Macroeconomics* the level and difficulty is higher, especially because you need to submit a problem set each week which is also graded. If you want a challenge in macroeconomics or want to pursue a PHD, I recommend this course since I learned a lot and the grades were perfectly fine in the end. Nevertheless, I think the grades significantly depend on how the professor grades the problem sets. The grade consists of around seven problem sets and one final.

Hybrid input-output analysis in Industrial Ecology – by NAKAMURA, Shinichiro

This is a fall semester course which means there is a lecture once a week until the end of the semester. Even though the content sounds a little bit strange I really liked this course. I learned a lot in a completely different area of economics and as a final report I conducted a hybrid Life Cycle Assessment of two aircraft types determining the amount of lifetime CO₂ emitted per passenger kilometre by aircraft type. I recommend this course to everybody who is open to learn something different than classical economics and especially to those who are interested in the area of environmental economics. Concerning the workload and difficulty, I think it is perfectly doable as the scope of the final report really depends on your motivation. The grade consists of several mini quizzes at the beginning of the lectures, a small essay and the mentioned final report.

Time Series Analysis – by KATAYAMA, Munechika

This is a fall semester course. As I have never had any lecture in time series analysis I found the course challenging, however it is still perfectly doable if you study a bit for yourself since during the lecture the professor more or less just rushes through the slides. The workload depends on your R or STATA as well as Google skills as you need to submit two to three problem sets which besides the final exam also count for your grade. If you are willing to put in a little effort, I recommend the course because you can learn a lot and the grades were more than fair.

Economics of Development and Environment – by TAKAHASHI, Ryo

This is also a fall semester course. Even though it is marked as quantitative, in my opinion it was not quantitative at all, which however I did not mind. The course gives a good overview of interesting topics in the field of development and environmental economics, however when having heard for instance *Development Economics III* in Frankfurt it is a bit dissatisfying because the econometric methods of a lot of studies is not discussed at all. If you want an easy but still interesting course and you don't mind to just study in a qualitative way, I recommend this course. The grade consists of a small report, a final exam and attendance.

International Finance and the Economy – by TANIUCHI, Mitsuru

This is also a fall semester course, offered by the Graduate School of Commerce. Since the course is offered to students with a diverse academic background the economic level is really basic and, in my opinion, it is really easy to get a very good grade without a lot of effort. However, I did not find the course boring because it offers a great qualitative overview of, for instance, the foreign exchange market and the money market as well as their interrelations. The grade consists of attendance and participation as well as a final exam.

Furthermore, there are also several Japanese Language Courses offered by Waseda University for international students, however, unfortunately I did not get into one, because too many students registered for it.

STUDENT LIFE IN TOKYO

As Tokyo is an immensely huge city, one of the most important advantages in my everyday life was the proximity of the Waseda Hoshien dorm to the campus (five minutes walking distance). The area surrounding the dorm/campus is quite residential and calm, however, you can still get everything you need as well as find plenty of restaurants to eat. Furthermore, the location of the campus/dorm in the North of Shinjuku is also very convenient and there are two subway stations close by to explore different areas of Tokyo. Moreover, the dormitory is really big and hence, it is easily possible to get to know plenty of interesting people from all over the world, to spend time together in the community room or to explore Tokyo by day and by night. The Waseda campus, on which the Graduate School of Economics is based, is really cute with a nice campus café and a small park. The canteen is also good, especially when considering the fact that everything costs below 5 euros. Furthermore, I liked the variety of student clubs which you can join to get to know more people, especially Japanese students. I joined the Soran (=traditional Japanese dance) group of the Waseda International Festival (WIF) student club as well as supported the German lunches offered by the Intercultural Communication Center (ICC) for students interested in Germany. Moreover, the ICC also offers various activities throughout the semester and I recommend subscribing to their email list in order to be informed of all their events. In addition, as we were quite a lot of QTEM students at Waseda University we also went out several times for dinner together which was organized by the QTEM student association (QSA) leader of Waseda University and which was always a lot of fun. Besides the classical things you can do in Tokyo, I recommend visiting the Waseda festival as well as going to a Baseball game of Waseda

University against for instance their rival Keio University. This is really a unique event because you will realize that the supporting students/cheerleaders will change from their normal, quiet “Japaneseness” to extremely active and loud students once it comes to motivating the fans to support the Waseda Baseball team and you can really feel the “Waseda spirit”. To get in touch with the traditional Japanese culture, I highly recommend watching one act of Kabuki Theater (or alternatively Noh Theater) which you can easily do in Tokyo and which is extensively described in the really interesting and recommendable book “Lost Japan” by Alex Kerr.

TRAVELLING

I really recommend taking enough time to travel around Japan in order to get to know their culture better. I travelled around Japan for three weeks before I moved to Tokyo. I went to Kamikochi in the Japanese Alps where I stayed at a secluded Onsen, to the Yamanakako Lake close to Mt. Fuji, Kyoto, Hiroshima and slept two nights in a traditional temple at Mt. Koya. I also did the Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine route in the Japanese Alps during the fall foliage where I stayed in Omachi to discover the Japanese countryside. Moreover, after the exams I rent a room with sea view in a hostel in Heda, a small fishing village on Izu Peninsula. I can highly recommend all the places I went to! Furthermore, I also visited Seoul with a one-day hike in the Bukhansan National Park, Singapore as well as Vietnam over the two weeks Christmas break. Again, everything was very recommendable!

CONCLUSION

I can highly recommend spending one semester abroad at Waseda University with the QTEM program. Even though it was a lot of work, I really learned a lot academically. But even more important, I got valuable insights into the unique Japanese culture in which respect for other people and the well-being of the society is definitively valued over self-focused behaviour – a cultural trait you can feel everyday through the friendliness and service-orientation of Japanese people and which in my opinion can serve as a role model, at least to a certain extent, for societies in other countries. To experience it yourself, apply for Waseda University and enjoy exploring a unique, extremely beautiful, and culturally rich country!