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Bowdoin Language Study Award Essay

I learned a lot in the 8-weeks I spent studying Japanese at the Middlebury Language school. I was placed into the Intermediate-Advanced class and I got to know my fellow classmates very well. After signing the language pledge, everyone was very hesitant to begin communicating in only Japanese. I found myself constantly thinking about how to say a basic phrase every time I spoke. This was a challenge I had never faced before. However, The Middlebury Language School creates an environment where mistakes are welcomed and not judged. Everyone in the program was also incredibly patient with each other. I truly believe I made life-long friends during the program. During the 8-weeks my friends and I invented “ご褒美金曜日” or “Reward Friday.” “Reward Friday” occurred every week and challenged us to explore what we could do in Middlebury, Vermont. We had worked hard the whole week, so we deserved to do something fun on Friday. One Friday we went to get tea from Stone Leaf Teahouse and another day we went on a walk to the nearby waterfall. It was a very rewarding experience being with friends at Middlebury and engaging in conversation only in Japanese.

Aside from the activities I participated in at the Japanese language school, I also was enthusiastic about our final project. Everyone in my Japanese level was tasked with a 4-5 page final report and a 10 minute presentation explaining our project. We prepared this project in 5 weeks and we were assigned an advisor to help guide us through our thesis. My final project was titled “大学は出たけれど...意味がない” which roughly translates to “I Graduated But...It Has No Meaning.” For this project I compared the movie “I Graduated But...” to modern Japan. “I Graduated But...” is a 1929 Japanese movie written and directed by Ozu Yasujiro. The film is only 10 minutes long, and it depicts the life of a Japanese man who has graduated college and is trying to find a job. While he looks for a job, he is offered a receptionist position, however, he insists that since he graduated from college he deserves a better job. Unfortunately, he is given no other choice but to take the receptionist position. His new boss’ last words to him in the film are “You have finally realized the reality of life.” After discovering this film I was inspired by the relationship the 1929 movie had with the meaning of college and finding a job in current, 21st century Japan. In my report I studied the “worker ant” lifestyle of many Japanese salarymen, who are valued for their skill and not their personal qualities. I also spent a lot of time researching how Japanese students perceive college in Japan. Many had responded with “College

is a waste of time here,” which resonated with the movie’s plot as well. It was interesting to learn how Japan has changed so much and so little since the 1920s. Writing this entire report in Japanese also taught me a lot. I learned how to articulate certain sentences better and I remember going over specific sentences that make sense with English in mind, but can not be written in Japanese. I think the biggest challenge was trying to write an essay in Japanese without using my English writing skills. In many ways, it felt like learning how to write an essay all over again. I am so grateful I was given the opportunity to attend the Language School and what I learned in only 8-weeks will definitely help me as I continue to pursue fluency in Japanese.