

# Migrants or Study Abroad? An analysis of the study abroad experience of foreign students in an English taught degree program in Japan

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## Intro

As part of a research project, I worked with Professor Neriko Doerr to interview a class of students at Doshisha University's ILA Program about their experience as study abroad students. The direction of this research was derailed before it even began due to a single question. When asked if they were willing to participate in research about "study-abroad students" we were surprised to learn that these students rejected that label. We quickly discovered that, at least within the context of the ILA program, the term "study abroad" has become a loaded term. "We are not study abroad!" almost every student in the room responded, which seemed naturally contradictory. Many of them are officially here on "study abroad" visas, and in the eyes of the university and the eyes of the Japanese government, they are officially labeled as study abroad. Yet they do not feel comfortable identifying themselves as study abroad students. Their unexpected response reveals a contradiction that goes to the heart of what we mean by "study abroad."

These students argue that Japan, or a specific region, city, or town in Japan, "is now their 'home' because they see their future there, because they feel at home and comfortable there, because Japan was never "not home," and because they have "no intention of going elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> This came as a shock to both Professor Doerr and myself. At the time I had spent eight years in Japan as a

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1 Neriko Musha Doerr, Gregory Poole, and Roy G. Hedrick, " 'Post-study-abroad students,' 'Never study abroad students,' and the politics of belonging: The global education effect of Japan's English-Medium campus," *The Global Education Effect and Japan*, March 2020, 119.

student, and often referred to myself as a study abroad student (*ryugakusei*). My enrollment was done through the Office of International Students, and my visa said “*ryugakusei*.” Yet though I had never thought carefully about the label, the objection among the ILA students made sense to me when I heard it. I certainly feel at home here in Japan and have no plans to return home permanently anytime soon. Further thought on this topic led to our article examining the experiences and perceptions of students who studied at the ILA. Students in that program have a complicated relationship with the concept of study abroad. The phrase “study abroad student” carries with it certain expectations and connotations for both native Japanese and other study abroad students. Many of the students at the ILA feel that these connotations do not accurately apply to them. Their relationships with other Japanese, other foreigners, and their own identity presents a situation not quite the same as that presented by study abroad materials.

In this writing, I examine how temporary study-abroad students make the host country their home. I will do so by introducing three students who were enrolled in the ILA program at the time of their interviews. These students have all spent the majority of their lives abroad but have now settled in Kyoto. This will demonstrate that despite being outsiders to Japan, be it culturally or officially, they have found a place they feel comfortable in Japanese society. While they may not officially have permanent residency nor are close to applying for it, they feel comfortable here and have made choices with long term residency in mind. In doing so, they challenge the assumptions of study abroad programs, along with their assumed category of study abroad student.

Long-term study abroad students, like those in the ILA program, are an often-overlooked group when it comes to materials related to study abroad. While the wording and emphasis of study abroad materials may differ slightly, much of it focuses on the goals of study abroad. These goals are often stated to be the fostering of “global knowledge,” “global competence,” and “cross-cultural adaptability” among the participants of study abroad. Their focus varies from how to best measure learning outcomes accurately, to how to foster the desired outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The main issue with these outcomes is that they tend to focus on the student’s life after they return to their home country. The study abroad experience is assumed to be something temporary, a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience, thus the focus of this research is on short-term study abroad

programs such as semester-long or short-term summer exchange programs. In this article, using examples from interviews and observations of students on campus, I will examine the disconnect that exists between the expectations of study abroad programs, and the experiences of students in the ILA Program. Doing so will allow us to see that the students of long-term study abroad programs view their time in the host country as something permanent. To them, it is not a host country, but their new home. In short, this study helps us to understand a facet of learning abroad that is often overlooked.

## The Research Field: A Short Introduction to the ILA

When the term “study-abroad” is used in promotional materials, it most often refers to a short-term exchange program of one or two semesters abroad at a host university, before returning to their “home” university. Yet the ILA, which stands for the Institute of the Liberal Arts, is not a short-term study-abroad program. Instead, it is an English taught, four-year undergraduate degree program. It is open to both *ryugakusei* and Japanese nationals who are interested in receiving an English-language education and a bachelor’s degree in the liberal arts. Students choose one of three concentrations upon entering the program: Humanities and the Human Sciences, Business and Economics, or Politics and Policy Studies. Students are encouraged to take courses outside of their concentration, and required courses are kept to a minimum in order to enable this. Most courses are taught entirely in English, though many of the teachers are also capable of speaking Japanese to at least some degree. Occasional language assistance for classes is given by these teachers, but students are expected to have a fluent English ability. While there is no Japanese language requirement to enroll, students in the ILA are encouraged to take Japanese language courses offered by the CJLC.<sup>3</sup> These vary from

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2 For an understanding of some of the challenges of assessing the globalizing effect see: Darla K. Deardorff, “Understanding the Challenges of Assessing Global Citizenship.” *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad* (Routledge 2010): 368-386. For information on some of the thought behind program designs see the following: William Brustein, “It takes an Entire Institution: A Blueprint for the Global University” *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship* 1st Edition (Routledge 2009): pp 249-265. Brustein, William. “It Takes an Entire Institution: A Blueprint for the Global University” *The Handbook of*

introductory Japanese to highly advanced levels a native Japanese speaker would struggle to complete.

A key feature of the ILA is that it is somewhat separated from the main Doshisha Campus. The vast majority of ILA classes take place on the Karasuma campus, which is about a five-to-ten-minute walk away from the much larger Imadegawa and Shinmachi campuses. While this is not that far physically, there is a logistical and mental distance between the three campuses. While there are some exchange students on the two larger campuses, such as those in the Center for Global Education (an exchange program taught mostly in English) and in the Center for Japanese Language and Culture (an intensive language program taught entirely in Japanese), ILA students tend to stick to the Karasuma campus where they are closer to their classes. Due to this, in the hallways and lounges of the Karasuma campus, it is not uncommon to hear English being spoken among the students. While all of Doshisha's campuses are "Japanese" buildings on "Japanese" campuses, there is a "global" atmosphere on the Karasuma campus not present on the other two campuses.

The students of the ILA come from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. While not strictly a "study abroad" or exchange program, the ILA is made up of many students from abroad and is somewhat disconnected from typical university life at a Japanese university. It was put best by one of my interviewees, "I feel comfortable here because everyone has an international background. That is really interesting for me because I don't have to be special anymore because everyone is special. No one belongs here." It is expected that few at the ILA share your background, very little can be assumed about your fellow classmate from outside observations. This combined with the distance from the main campus means that the ILA exists separate from larger Doshisha University life. Students like those in the ILA program get little notice in existing materials on study abroad.

## Existing Materials on Study Abroad

Some more recent work has begun to explore beyond the traditional view of

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3 The Center for Japanese Language and Culture, an intensive Japanese language program. Until recently it was a program open to anyone, but now is reserved solely for exchange students and foreign students studying at Doshisha.

study abroad as temporary. Shanthi Robertson examines the concept of “student-migrants” and the “education-migration nexus” in her book *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State: The Education-Migration Nexus*. Her research examines the “staggered process of entry” of student-migrants into Australia through a process called the “education-migration nexus.” The education-migration nexus is described by the author as a “long-term migration trajectory” that exists as an uneasy combination of international education and skilled migration policies in Australia and other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations. It exists as a “complex web of regulatory systems that simultaneously enabled and constrained their ability to enter the state temporarily as students and then to accumulate the capital required to become skilled migrants.”<sup>4</sup> While on one hand it enabled students to transition from temporary work visas to permanent residency, it was also a convoluted process that could block a person’s advancement for the smallest of reasons. One of the examples given is a student whose English ability was fluent, but still spoke with a strong Chinese accent. While she excelled on the grammar and written portion, she failed to get a high enough score on the spoken portion of the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam to get into the university course she wanted to take. Without this course, she was unable to finish her degree, without her degree she could not get PR (Permanent Residency) and without that she would have to wait another year before her husband and child could join her in Australia. For these students their journey is one “fraught with specific challenges and obstacles” as the requirements for permanent residency could change at any time, and there were specific goals that had to be completed in a timely manner in order to remain in Australia. This “education-migration nexus” shows us that study abroad has become vastly more complicated than originally thought. While the exact form of the nexus that exists in Australia does not quite exist in Japan, the situation for the ILA students is very similar. There is a set path most of these students have in mind in order to gain permanent residency, though many of the ILA students lack some of the urgency that was implied in Robertson’s writing. This is in part due to how positively many of the ILA students are viewed by the larger population of Japan.

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4 Shanthi Robertson, *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State The Education-Migration Nexus* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

While once viewed as a temporary sojourn with a purely educational motivation, international education research has “begun to recognize that studying overseas is both a form in itself of labor migration, and a precursor to subsequent migrations.”<sup>5</sup> Robertson stated that, at least in Australia, media and the public imagination, along with a good bit of academic discourse, have tended to divide student-migrants into two highly limited stereotypes. The first being that of the savvy, professional and elite “designer migrants” who need no “analytic attention nor settlement support.”<sup>6</sup> These students are viewed as the ideal migrant, those who, after living in Australia for years while going through this “education-migration nexus” have become acculturated to life in Australia. But at the same time, foreign students are also cast as ‘back-door migrants’ who either exploit the education system for disingenuous purposes or become victims of the unscrupulous global education industry. They are viewed in a negative light, as those taking advantage of the education system in order to further their migration goals. Instead, Robertson argued that most student-migrants were somewhere in the middle of these two stereotypes and hoped that a qualitative approach would help shed some light on the diversity of their experiences. Robertson’s work was an attempt to expand upon existing transnationalism research by examining this effect, which she calls “middling transnationalism.” Middling transnationalism refers to how student-migrants show characteristics of both “highly skilled and highly mobile ‘flexible citizens’ and of vulnerable and exploitable labour migrants.” They are a “blurring of boundaries around different categories of migrants” and examining the “complex interplays of strategizing, obligation, desire and uncertainty”<sup>7</sup> that shape the student-migrant experience.

While the education-immigration nexus may not exist in the same form in Japan as it does in Australia, it shows us that these students are more than just temporary visitors and presents to us a view of students as migrants. In Robertson’s work we hear very little of the experiences of the students except for when it directly relates to the nexus. It is instead centered around the mechanism and logistics of the “education-migration nexus.” The students she

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5 Karine Tremblay, “Academic Mobility and Education,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 9, no. 3 (2005): pp. 196-228.

6 Robertson, *Transnational Student-Migrants*, 16.

7 Robertson, *Transnational Student-Migrants*, 5.

researched were also in quite a different educational environment than those in the ILA. The students in Robertson's work also mainly have come from developing countries, making the stakes of their migration are considerably higher than many of those in the ILA. In addition, many of them were earlier in their migration process than students in the ILA. But by focusing on the experiences of the students themselves, we can see not only how they are similar to migrants, but also how they present themselves to others despite their precarious position in society.

### Alice<sup>8</sup>

Alice was born and raised in England and is here as a study abroad student on a study abroad visa.<sup>9</sup> When asked, "Where are you from?" Alice confidently and quickly answered, "England." If you take a look at her visa it says that she is a "study abroad student" from England, she even speaks with a slight English accent. While she is officially a "study abroad student" in the eyes of the Japanese government and her host university, she does not like to be identified as a "study abroad" student. She no longer views England as where she belongs, "I never lived in England as an adult. I don't know what England is like to live in or work in." Furthermore, she stated that there was nowhere in England she would really consider her home. She stated that, "If I consider myself a study abroad student, I don't consider myself a resident and that is a very weird place to be." She views herself as a resident of Japan, to her it is home, not a temporary host.

Born and raised in England, Alice is currently a student within the global culture concentration of the ILA. Alice grew up in a rather small village of around 100 people, attending an elite private school in a nearby area. She had trouble fitting in with kids at the elite school because of her rural origins, and trouble fitting in with the kids in her village due to attending the elite school.

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8 This, and all other names used during this article are pseudonyms. All other information about their lives, unless otherwise noted, is unchanged.

9 The visa issued to students at the ILA lists the status as "留学" which means "study abroad" in English. Typically, it lasts until the student's enrollment ends, though for some programs it must be renewed every year. Those with a study abroad visa are not allowed to work, but they can apply for permission to work part time for up to 28 hours per week.

She was also sick very often, being in and out of the hospital so often that she wasn't even able to graduate high school. For these reasons she felt she had little connection to those around her, never really making close friends. For her it wasn't a hard decision to try study abroad.

When she was younger, she had exposure to Japanese culture in numerous ways. Like most kids growing up in the 90s, she was exposed to Japanese anime when she was a kid, watching Pokémon after school quite often with a Japanese friend. She even visited Japan when she was younger. She first visited Japan at the age of 13 with her father for a Judo exposition. When she turned 18, having some experience in the country and a basic understanding of the language, she decided to move to Japan on her own. She spent three years in Aichi studying Japanese at an intensive language school while also working close to full time as an English teacher. When she had turned 21, she had completed that language program and felt that she had "outgrown" the city she was in. She came across the ILA program at an open house, and after spending some time discussing her future with some of the permanent professors in the program, decided to enroll. She plans on continuing to graduate school once she completes the ILA and has no plans to return permanently to England.

While she identifies as English, it is often assumed she is American before she speaks. Her accent makes it clear she is not, however, and she does not mind this identification based on other's perceptions. What she did not like was the label of a "study abroad student." She views herself as an Englishwoman, whose home is Japan. This is because she doesn't view her current place in Japan as temporary, she has made a life here, in fact more than she has ever made back home in England. She stated, "I never lived in England as an adult. I don't know what England is like to live in or work in." Because of this, she rejects the label of "study abroad." "I would not classify myself as a study abroad student. I own my own house in Japan. I own property. I have a dog. I plan on staying here." It is not only a sense of belonging to her present plans, but also her future intent and commitment to live in Japan.

While legally she is "just" a temporary student, in the ways that matter to her she is a resident of Japan. Her rejection of the term study abroad is because she views her life, and the lives of others in the ILA, as something fundamentally different from a study abroad student. Her belief is that Japan is not "abroad." She lists numerous reasons for this belief. The first being that her



application originated from Japan. She stated that herself and “everyone apart from 2 or 3 in my intake were internal Japanese intakes. They applied from in Japan.” Due to the fact she and other students have “weird passport situations or are long term in Japan” their position is different from that of a traditional study abroad student, though seemingly typical for the ILA. She states that they have already become part of Japanese culture (or were always part of it) and their application to this program is just continuing this.

She believes that she has found a place in Japanese society and can successfully navigate it. She stated that her most memorable experiences while in Japan was “doing normal life stuff. Those moments, accomplishing those sorts of things in Japanese and feeling like an upstanding member of society, as much as I ever will be one\*laughs\*, was really memorable.” The experiences she found most memorable were not the ones that the discourse of study abroad would lead you to believe. She did not talk about how different life in Japan was, the adventures she had, or the cultural misunderstandings she had. Instead, her most memorable experiences were things that people experience living life anywhere. Buying a house, raising a dog, experiences that she would be proud of even if she had done them back in England. There was some pride in being able to do these things in Japanese, but that was just an added bonus. To her, Japan isn’t some fundamentally different place, but her home.

Unlike the student-migrants presented in Robertson’s work, she has made her own path to life in Japan. A lot of this is due to her more privileged upbringing, the sense of pressure and importance to remaining in Japan is absent for her. She has no need to send money back home to support her family, and what she has learned will be just as useful back home if she one day decides to return. This is unlikely, however, because as a native English speaker she can always find work as an English teacher. Entry into the country was also much easier for her, there was no “migration-education nexus” for her to navigate. She obtained a visa from her school, and upon graduation, will likely be able to obtain permanent residency easily due to having obtained a degree in Japan as well as living in Japan for an extended time. While the pressures and issues she faces are different, she does follow a similar pathway to permanent residency like those in Robertson’s work. She is not “just study abroad,” but a “student-migrant”.

For Alice she does not mind being identified as a foreigner based upon her

appearance or how she speaks. She claims she is “English” and is aware of the advantages that being foreign can give her. Instead she takes issue with the idea of Japan being “abroad” to her. She is fluent in Japanese, owns a house in Japan, and has worked and studied in Japan for many years. Despite this, she identifies as non-Japanese, and has no intention of “becoming” Japanese. She believes that one can be non-Japanese, but also find Japan as their home. This is the key difference between study abroad and students at the ILA to her. Bob’s views on his place in Japanese society were also very similar to that of Alice.

## Bob

Unlike Alice, Bob had a more “international” upbringing so to speak. His mother is from Germany, and his father from the United Kingdom. At the time of his birth, however, his parents were missionaries in South Korea. His place of birth was an accident, he was born premature while his parents were in South Korea. Shortly after his birth his family moved to Germany for around six months, and then moved to England, where he lived until he was 18 years old. He often moved back and forth between England and Germany as a child in order to visit family.

Once it came time for college, he moved to Austria to attend the University of Vienna. He enrolled in the Japanese Studies program there but stated that he “wasn’t a fan.” He had always been more interested in Japanese history, but the program he was in focused more on modern Japanese culture. After two years he decided to attend a three-month summer exchange program to help improve his Japanese, and while there he attended Doshisha’s open campus. He met one of the Professors during his visit and became interested in the ILA. He stated that he was “basically recruited” to the program at this time. So while the ILA was the first time he has spent an extended time in Japan, it wasn’t his first time abroad.

He spent a lot of his life going abroad, from England to Germany to Austria, and like many others in the ILA, he does not like the “where are you from?” question. In part because it is a rather annoying question for him to answer. He spoke about his typical experience when being asked about his background, “Are you English or German? ...Okay, where were you born? Korea? That doesn’t help.” The question did not irritate him as much as it did others I

interviewed, because he thought it was to be expected. "People are superficial, even if I am here for the next 40 years. No one is ever gonna come up to me and go, 'Look at how Japanese you are! Congratulations!'" He knows he is an outsider, both visually and culturally. "Even if I live the rest of my life here, no one is gonna call me Japanese. You can't make people accept you." Even though he has learned how to communicate in Japanese and participate in Japanese society, he is well aware of the fact he will never become Japanese, "I can learn to understand Japanese people and how people interact socially and how they communicate with each other. But that doesn't make me Japanese. It doesn't mean people will accept me as Japanese." In fact, he even mentioned some of the issues he has faced, "I get looks. I get kids pointing at me all the time, 'gaikokujin.' That won't stop." But instead of being demoralized by this, it drove him to improve. "It means you always have to keep pushing yourself to interact and better yourself. Get better at Japanese, get better at whatever, you know. Being a foreigner can be difficult, but it can be great." Bob was extremely positive about his place and experiences in Japan. Unlike others, he didn't seem bothered by the first impression being a foreigner tended to give off.

Despite the conscious knowledge of the fact that he will never become Japanese, Bob still believes that Japan is where he belongs. "I want to stay in Japan...I could live here the rest of my life. I would be very happy about that idea. It doesn't mean I can't be part of Japanese society." The main difference from how he spoke about being part of Japanese society and how Alice approached it is that he acknowledged that it is a lot of work to fit in. "It is up to you to create life. If you don't want to feel isolated, it is up to you to integrate yourself. It is up to you to meet Japanese people. It is up to you to understand Japanese people." To become part of Japanese society, you have to learn how to become part of it. He was aware his language skills were a little lacking but knew how to otherwise participate in Japanese society. He even mentioned others he had seen who had not put in the work, "Some foreigners I find here in Japan, the ones I feel really isolated are the people who make no effort to try and understand Japan and what Japanese think." Bob believes that belonging is something that must be worked towards. Not something that just comes with time or experience, but something that you must actively attempt to do.

Unsurprisingly, Bob felt that Japan was where he belonged, in almost the same words as Alice, he stated that, "In a way you feel like you are integrating

into society in a very special way. Maybe not the way that is normal, but you are integrating yourself and you know that.” Just like Alice, he felt that he, and the rest of the ILA, were a part of Japanese society. Similar to Alice he had also made his own path to Japan. He had transferred to the ILA, and upon graduation planned to work in Japan. He also believed he would have no trouble finding a job as a native English speaker and was open to the possibility of gaining permanent residency one day. Despite this he is well aware that he is not Japanese, and never will be Japanese, but he *can* learn to become part of Japanese society.

## Maria

This isn't quite the case for Maria. Like Alice, Maria also spent most of her childhood abroad. When I initially met her, I assumed she spent her entire life in America until coming to Japan for the ILA. She acted and sounded just like the typical American university student. She identifies, however, in her own words as a “hafu<sup>10</sup>” and has spent her high school years in Japan before joining the ILA. Unlike Alice, she is not officially a “ryugakusei” in the eyes of the university or the Japanese government. Since she has dual citizenship, American and Japanese, she is officially enrolled as a domestic Japanese student. She does not require a ryugakusei visa, and therefore doesn't qualify for any of the ryugakusei advantages, such as scholarships and support. At the same time, her university experience is much different from that of a typical exchange student. Instead, she is sort of a mix of the two, “It's weird because I think institutionally, I am a domestic student. But in a sense culturally I am not a domestic student because I am not involved in circles anymore, I don't go to the same classes, I don't study the things they do, not even in the same language.” She stands between the two categories, not a study abroad student, but not quite a typical domestic student either.

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10 While the definition of ハーフ (hafu) is not quite set in stone. It is a Japanese term often used to refer to a person born to one ethnically Japanese parent and one non-Japanese parent. This term is considered derogatory by some and is the focus of much research. While it does play a role in how these students perceive themselves, some of the larger issues of hafu identity are outside of the scope of this paper. Maria wasn't particularly happy with some of the connotations and uses of the word, but she stated she often uses it because it is the best way to explain her background.

Maria was born in the United States and spent her childhood in South Carolina. Her father is American, and her mother is Japanese. The two met in university while her mother was doing study abroad in America. When she was thirteen, her parents decided it was time to move to Japan. Her father, a conservative Christian, felt he had a calling from God to come to Japan and teach, so they all moved to Japan together. Her family moved to Gunma Japan, an area known to be rather rural except for the Subaru factory. She jokingly called herself a “country girl in both senses,” she had grown up in the countryside in South Carolina and also in “inaka” Gunma. While she was exposed to Japanese language and culture as a child it was to a very limited degree, she said that she viewed herself as American. So unsurprisingly, when she first arrived, she hated Japan. “13-year-old Maria was like, ‘I am going back to America!’” She didn’t really speak the language fluently, or know how to live in Japan, and she had left everything she knew behind. So unsurprisingly she faced many issues at the school she attended. The school, which had opened rather recently, was described by Maria as an “immersive school.” Half the classes were taught in Japanese, and half were taught in English. Unfortunately, it was a newer school with mainly Japanese students, so by junior high (which is when Amanda began) not many kids were willing to speak English. This is how Maria learned Japanese, she needed to in order to communicate with her classmates. Even so, her Japanese was not up to a high school level, she constantly struggled with the Japanese taught classes. While she excelled in the English taught programs, she’d barely pass or even fail the Japanese sections. With what she expected was a little help from her teachers, her grades were just good enough for her to enroll into the IB department and she completed her high school degree in English. After high school, she decided to go to university in Japan, especially after seeing Doshisha during an open campus, “the moment I was on campus I was like, ‘Oh! I wanna go here!’” While initially Maria wanted to go back to the states for college, she eventually decided on the ILA. It was a lot easier on her family if she remained in Japan, plus she fell in love with the program after visiting their open house. It offered her a chance to see more of Japan, something she was unable to do while living in Gunma. Her parents recently returned to the United States, and she has elected to stay in Japan. She decided to stay in Japan, not just to finish her degree (which had less than a year left when her parents decided to return), but she also intends to

work in Japan after her graduation.

While her pathway to the ILA and even her official status was different, just like Alice Maria was against being called a study abroad student. While she is officially *not* a study abroad student, she *does* have a different experience than a domestic student and is often *treated* like an exchange student by others. In fact, she implies that she thinks the entire ILA is better described as a domestic program. “It is closer to be a domestic student. Because even though we always study is different, at least we are still on the same campus, we are immersed in the same culture every day, it is not like we are here and are completely new.” Just like Alice and Bob, Maria thinks that the experience of an ILA student is fundamentally different than that of a typical study abroad student, “Some of it is intentions, but I think it is the people we interact is a little different. It is not ‘abroad’ anymore.” Their day-to-day life is different from that of a study abroad student, so she dislikes being identified as one. She states that neither is really a good fit for what the ILA is, but if she had to choose between the two, she would say they are closer to domestic students. ILA students come into the program with an expectation of taking at least four years to graduate, and according to her this changes how they approach their life in Japan. The fact that the exchange program is longer and many intend to stay in Japan upon completion of their degree means that these students are much more likely to view their time in Japan as something more than temporary.

While she may not officially be a student-migrant and does not have to visit the Immigration Office to renew her visa or deal with the excessive and needless paperwork at the Office of International Students. She is a Japanese citizen enrolled into a Japanese University as a normal student. Even though she is not a student migrant, she shares a similar experience with other student-migrants in the ILA. Just like Bob, she is often viewed as an outsider who is just here temporarily. She struggles with the language like other foreigners and is excluded due to her looks. She is a student-migrant in spirit and is proof that just “being Japanese” within the ILA can be very complicated.

## Conclusion

The students in Doshisha’s ILA program subvert the expectations of a study

abroad program in almost every way. At first, it seems like it would be easy to dismiss the ILA as not being a “real” study abroad program. But as we can see from how the term “study abroad student” impacts everything they do and their struggles trying to find a place in Japanese society, that even though they may not be study abroad in the modern sense, the monolith of the study abroad industry hangs over their heads. The ILA even takes its own promotional slogans from this discourse. The front page of their website states, “Make your Education an Adventure,” but to these students their time in the ILA is not an adventure, but their normal everyday life.

We see this especially when speaking to Alice. She did not talk about immersing herself in Japanese culture or having life changing experiences. Instead, her most memorable experiences were things that people experience living life anywhere. Buying a house, raising a dog, experiences that she would be proud of even if she had done them back in England. She believes that she is here permanently, has done steps to make it so, and believes that she is a part of Japanese society, even though officially she is here as a student.

Ben believes the same thing, that long term students become a part of the local society. He was aware his language skills were a little lacking but knew how to otherwise participate in Japanese society. Bob believes that belonging is something that must be worked towards. Not something that just comes with time or experience, but something that you must actively attempt to do.

As a Japanese citizen Maria’s situation is somewhat different. While she is not actually a study abroad student, she is still *treated* as a study abroad student. On top of being treated differently because of how she looks, she also moved to Japan as a teenager and is still learning how to fit into society. Having Japanese citizenship hasn’t quite made her a “normal Japanese,” and she must still struggle to find her place in Japan while overshadowed by the connotations study abroad brings to life as a college student in Japan.

When speaking to students within this program, the ILA is not an adventure for them, but the beginning of their lives. The unique setting of the ILA also helps to push them towards living a permanent life in Japan. The diverse student body, and classes that question assumptions many people make about identity and borders push these students to question themselves and their role in society. While this is study abroad in the traditional sense, it does not quite match up with the how study abroad is presented in promotional materials. To

these students, Japan is not just a host country or a temporary adventure, but their new home. Their experiences challenges many of the assumptions of the role study abroad plays. In short, this study helps us to understand a facet of learning abroad that has been neglected by current research.



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**Abstract**

# Migrants or Study Abroad? An analysis of the study abroad experience of foreign students in an English taught degree program in Japan

Roy Gerard HEDRICK III

In this article, I explore the disconnect between the current discourse of study abroad materials and the actual experience of long-term study abroad students.

Using data from in-depth interviews and observations, I explore the concept of study abroad in relation to the identities of students in Doshisha's Institute of the Liberal Arts. The phrase "study abroad student" carries with it certain expectations and connotations for both native Japanese and other study abroad students. Many of the students at the ILA feel that these connotations do not accurately apply to them. Contemporary study abroad materials focus on the "three goals" of study abroad: fostering global knowledge, global competence, and cross cultural adaptability. Much of these materials try to figure out how best to measure these learning outcomes accurately, while others suggest activities to best achieve these desired outcomes. The focus of this is mainly on short-term, credit-seeking students who usually spend six months to a year abroad before returning home. This distinction highlights a gap in our current understanding of study abroad, there are many other types of study abroad students, the ILA being one program that is very different. Instead of conforming to the three educational goals of study abroad and viewing themselves as temporary, these students view themselves as permanent migrants. In so doing, they subvert the assumed borders created by the discourse of study abroad.

