

■ 28th START Program (Australia)

For a little over two weeks from February 19th to March 7th of 2016, 32 first year students participated in the 28th START Program (*). Led by Nanae Kojima (researcher at the Health Service Center) and two other faculty members, the students spent this time living and studying at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia.

Throughout their time at Flinders University, they worked and studied under the guidance of three instructors at the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI), being sorted into small groups of ten to eleven. During the mornings they received lessons on practical English, and in the afternoons they participated in group work, exchange activities, or discussion with local students. They also had lectures on everything from Australian history and culture to environmental issues. Classes included tips and techniques for giving presentations, practice in pronouncing particularly difficult English words, and lessons on special English phrases. Even for those who were not comfortable with English conversation at the outset, everyone spent their days studying their hardest and communicating with their host families so that, eventually, they became more confident in themselves and their English abilities. Although busy, this was a time of tremendous growth for everyone. Classes and other miscellaneous school activities typically took place from 8:30am to 4:00pm, and every other day the students would spend time with their host families.

Students also visited a local elementary school, introducing, in English, activities that are representative of Japanese culture such as origami and fukuwarai. This was also a chance for students to see and compare elementary education in Australia versus Japan. With the use of much hand gesturing, the students had a great time communicating in English with the children. And as a way of surveying life and society in Adelaide, the students also had the opportunity to visit a shopping center, a museum, and the downtown area.

The weekends were also put to good use during their stay; for example, the students spent one night and two days at Kangaroo Island, exploring the magnificent nature and ecology in which the wild animals live and, during the night tour, gazing upon a night sky brimming with glorious stars. Indeed, it was a

sight that could not be seen in Japan, and one that the students will never forget.

Furthermore, each student was assigned to a host family during their stay in Australia. The families graciously provided students with meals, a supportive home environment, and trips around the area, giving each student unique experiences that could not be had in a classroom.

On the last day of their study abroad, the six groups had been tasked with giving thirty minute presentations in English on a topic that examined the differences between Australia and Japan. With themes ranging from food culture, industrial structure, education system, sports, wildlife protection, to both countries' national characters, the groups had prepared for this day by interviewing and speaking with local students. The result was a culmination of the many lessons gleaned over the past two weeks, and the presentations were full of both academic insight and humor.

At the end of the presentations, a farewell party was held. The students thanked their teachers and host families and were presented certificates of completion by their instructors at the IELI.

In a reflection of their experiences while studying abroad, one of the students said upon returning to Japan that "I was immediately struck with the sense that my English skills had begun to rust. Given that I am no longer in an environment where English is the norm, I must actively apply myself to my language studies in order to continue improving." (Note: From this year's START Program onward, participating students must establish goals and objectives for their English studies and submit their TOEIC scores to the university in September). When it comes to life, one must look at oneself objectively, establish goals for moving forward, and figure out how to achieve such goals. Although the study abroad was short, the students seem to have gotten a grasp on the tools required to forge their paths into the future. After having participated in the START Program, it is impressive to reflect on the students' personal transformation and growth.



In front of the recently completed Plaza and Student Hub (multipurpose facility)



Discussion with local students