

■ 29th START Program (United States of America)

For a little over two weeks from February 20th to March 6th of 2016, 30 first year students participated in the 29th START Program (*). Led by Fuyuko Takita (Associate Professor at the Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education) and two other supervising faculty members, the students spent this time living and studying at James Madison University (JMU) in Virginia, U.S.

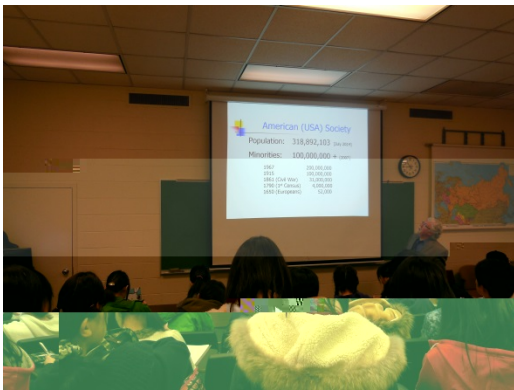
In what became a wonderful opportunity for language and cultural exchange, the START Program participants shared dorm rooms on campus with student RAs (resident advisors) during their two week stay. During the week, they received special lectures on American geography, history, culture, etc. taught by the local professors at JMU. They were also able to attend regular classes alongside their RAs. Seeing how the local students actively voiced their opinions and engaged in dialogues with their professors, in what is a fundamental part of university education in America, the Japanese students worked their hardest to adapt to this style of learning. Of course, it was a great struggle for them to express themselves and their opinions entirely in English, but by using familiar words and showing their eagerness to be active participants during class, they experienced the feeling of empowerment that comes from speaking one's opinion in another language. Furthermore, given that this year's program overlapped with the American presidential race, there were many debates and discussions on US presidential elections occurring during class time. During their free time, many of the students went to exercise at UREC (the University Recreation Center).

For the final day of the program, students were tasked with giving a presentation on a difference between Japan and the United States. Having chosen a topic beforehand, they spent a portion of their two weeks at JMU collecting data, surveying the RAs, and preparing for presenting their findings entirely in English.

On top of their busy schedule at JMU, the students visited a fire station, ventured into the Shenandoah Caverns, entered Mount Vernon (George Washington's house), interacted with the local children, and explored Washington D.C., the country's capital.

After returning to Japan, the students were asked to give up to three minute

speeches about their time at JMU. Along with having made new friends, having had valuable experiences, and being thankful for the opportunity itself, all the students shared the sense that during this two week START Program they had learned and realized something new about themselves or about the world. Many of the students have voiced that due to their experiences in the START Program they are more motivated to continue their language studies, do a further study abroad, or participate in volunteer activities.



Scene of a typical class



Venturing into the Shenandoah Caverns



Teaching a traditional Japanese game



In front of the White House