

Long distance learning

Honors collegium students learn with – and from – classmates in Japan



COURTESY OF ROMAN GROISBERG

Roman Groisberg, right, a first-year undeclared student, participates in a Japanese tea ceremony. Groisberg was one of eight students selected to travel to Japan as part of a UCLA course taught simultaneously in Los Angeles and Kyoto.

By **Narges Zohoury**
DAILY BRUIN SENIOR STAFF
nzohoury@media.ucla.edu

As 50 students gather in their Knudsen Hall classroom today to learn about genetic engineering, 30 more students will join them from Japan, thanks to fiber-optic cables, electrical blackboards and the desire of professors worldwide to provide their students with a multicultural experience.

Professor Bob Goldberg teaches the Honors Collegium course "Genetic Engineering in Medicine, Agriculture and Law" every Tuesday and Thursday at UCLA and Kyoto, Japan simultaneously.

And, pushing the multi-cultural experience to another level, eight students from the class and two teaching assistants had the opportunity to go to Japan and stay with their classmates at the University of Kyoto during the first week of February. Goldberg did not accompany the students on the trip.

Goldberg partnered with the University of Kyoto for the first time two years ago, participating in a similar program but with a different science course. He decided to work with the program this year, upon special request from its counterparts in Kyoto.

The funding for this year's program comes from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Goldberg is a part of the HHMI University Professors Program and has received a faculty teaching grant from the institute.

"HHMI gave me a million dollars to excite students in the process of discovery," Goldberg said.

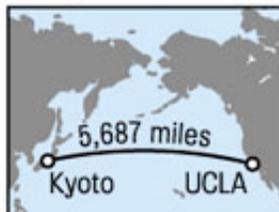
The trip was educational in a broader sense than just science for the students, who said they did not have a great knowledge of the Japanese culture before the trip.

"The idea behind the group going to Japan was for the American students to interact with the Japanese students and get an insight into Japanese higher education," said Roman Groisberg, a first-year undeclared student who was one of the students picked to go to Japan.

The eight students were picked through a random lottery and took the class from the other side of the electrical blackboard for a week. They did their assignments and quizzes in Japan and still had to participate in the highly interactive class.

TWO CULTURES OF EDUCATION

Eight UCLA students traveled to the University of Kyoto, Japan, earlier this month and discovered the differences between themselves and the students at the Japanese university.



At the end of this month, 16 University of Kyoto students will have a similar experience when they travel to Los Angeles and stay with their American classmates.

Upon their return, the UCLA students were assigned to write an essay discussing the differences between the ways education is approached in the two countries.



"The way they live is very different than what we are used to here, including their study habits," said student-traveler Ray Chacon, a second-year biology student. "They wouldn't stop studying until they were sure that they knew all the material."

Goldberg agreed that many of the students in the Japanese university study "a hundred times" more compared to the students at UCLA, who typically learn only as much as they think they need to know.

He added that observing these different traits is helpful in the learning process, as the students in Japan see spontaneity in the classroom environment at UCLA and the UCLA students see the determination exhibited by the Kyoto students.

Another traveler, Mary Conklin, a third-year English student, noted the dedication illustrated by the fact that the Kyoto students are taking the class in English, in some ways making the material more challenging for them.

But she said she also saw similarities between the two cultures, as she could relate to the Kyoto students when it came to staying up all night before a big test.

Goldberg said the class as a bridge between different cultures is a novel thing for both UCLA and Japanese students.

"The way they interact is very formal," Conklin said. "They envy the way we could touch each other when we spoke."

Goldberg said the challenge of relating the material to two learning systems goes beyond the class's academic aspects.

"The class is very challenging to pull off ... it bridges both a culture gap and a language gap," he said, adding that in his last experience with the program, the traits of both groups of students had rubbed off on each other by the end of the quarter.

This exchange resulted in the UCLA students becoming more studious and the Japanese students becoming more comfortable with asking questions, Goldberg said.