



KAKEHASHI Project (United States／Canada)
Invitation Program for
The Winners of Japanese Speech Contest (United States),
Japanese Language Communication (Canada) and Japan Bowl (Canada) Report

1. Program Overview

【Objectives and Overview】

This program was conducted from February 13 to 19 with the main objective of having eleven Japanese speech contest winners from the United States, five Canadian students studying Japanese, and five students who had excelled in the annual Canada Japan Bowl^(Note) along with a chaperone visit Tokyo, Kanagawa and Aichi to deepen their understanding and knowledge of Japanese culture, society and history; to further deepen their familiarity with Japan; and to strengthen networks among the participants through homestays, a school exchange, observation visits, and exchanges with government officials, etc.

Note: A quiz competition in which high school students taking the Japanese language as a foreign language compete on their knowledge of the Japanese language and culture. It began in the United States in 1992 and has been held in Canada and other countries since 2016.

【Participants】 Total: 22 participants (11 Japanese speech contest winners from the U.S. and 5 university students from Canada studying Japanese language communication and 5 high school students and undergraduate students along with a chaperone from Canada)

(Breakdown) United States 11, Canada 11

【Locations】 Tokyo, Kanagawa, Aichi

【Schedule】

■ Online Pre-study Program:

Feb. 5 (Thu) **【Pre-departure Orientation】** Project objective and mission, rundown of the schedule, overseas travel warnings, precautions of infectious disease, etc.

Set Period Prior to Arrival **【Video Viewing】** “Lecture on Japan” (Choose on Web Japan)

■ Invitation Program:

Feb. 13 (Fri) Arrival at Narita International Airport and Haneda Airport

【Post-arrival Orientation】

Feb. 14 (Sat) Travel from Tokyo to Aichi

【Observation】 Nagoya Castle

【Meeting with the Host Families】

Feb. 15 (Sun) **【Homestay】** Nagoya City

【Farewell Party with the Host Families】

Feb. 16 (Mon) **【School Exchange (including Cultural Experience)】**

Chukyo University (Tea Ceremony Experience)

Travel from Aichi to Tokyo

Feb. 17 (Tue) **【Courtesy Call】** Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado
【Observation】 TEPIA (Association for Technological Excellence Promoting Innovative Advances)
【Courtesy Call】 Mr. OUE Sadamasa, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister
【Observation】 Meiji-jingu shrine, Harajuku (Japanese pop culture)

Feb. 18 (Wed) **【Observation】** Kiyosumi Gardens, Fukagawa Edo Museum
Travel from Tokyo to Kanagawa
【School Exchange】
Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC)

Travel from Kanagawa to Tokyo

Feb. 19 (Thu) **【Workshop】** Preparations for the Reporting Session (summarizing program findings, preparation of action plans)
【Reporting Session】 Presentations of Program Findings and Action Plans
Departure from Narita International Airport and Haneda Airport

2. Program Photos

Invitation Program

	
February 14, 2026 【Observation】 Nagoya Castle	February 15, 2026 【Homestay】 Nagoya City
	
February 15, 2026 【Farewell Party with the Host Families】	February 16, 2026 【School Exchange, Cultural Experience】 Chukyo University

	
February 17, 2026 【Courtesy Call】 Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado (Note) This photo is for this report alone and may not be disclosed on social media.	February 17, 2026 【Observation】 TEPIA (Association for Technological Excellence Promoting Innovative Advances)
	
February 18, 2026 【Observation】 Kiyosumi Gardens	February 18, 2026 【School Exchange】 Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC)
	
February 19, 2026 【Reporting Session】	February 19, 2026 【Reporting Session】 Group photo

3. Voices from the Participants (excerpt)

◆ Undergraduate Student (United States)

This entire program helped me realize that the world is not so big and that the world could be a better place if we attained mutual understanding and respect for one another.

◆ **Undergraduate Student (Canada)**

The homestay in Nagoya and the exchange with Chukyo university were amongst my favorite parts of the Program. The host family was very kind and welcoming, and in both the exchange and homestay it was clear how much thought and effort went into creating a good experience for us.

◆ **Undergraduate Student (Canada)**

We were deeply moved by the hospitality and kindness we received during our stay at our host family's home. They welcomed us so warmly, and their kindness is something we will never forget.

We were also impressed by the exchange at Chukyo University. VOICE, the international student group in charge of the exchange, gave a fun and creative presentation, and the activities—such as calligraphy, origami, and games—were truly enjoyable and made the time feel very fulfilling.

4. Voices from the Receiving Parties (excerpt)

◆ **Observation Destination Representative**

We were truly honored and deeply grateful that a student, whose previous visit to Japan as part of your delegation led him to enroll at our center, was able to welcome this year's delegation in the role of a senior.

I believe this program was highly meaningful, as it allowed participants to explore aspects of Japan and its cultural depth that are difficult to grasp through ordinary visits alone. Through their interactions, they were able to gain a richer and more profound understanding.

◆ **Host Family**

I was initially worried about whether the students would be comfortable with Japanese foods and whether we would be able to communicate smoothly. However, we ended up enjoying our meals together, and since their Japanese was very good, they understood about 80% of our conversations in Japanese, which was a great help to us.

I was also surprised that, although they were already good at Japanese, they knew many Japanese songs and sang them very well when we went to karaoke. They were polite, used respectful and courteous language, and spoke beautifully, which left a strong impression on me. In addition, during the farewell party, I was impressed to see the Japanese students expressing their feelings in English. It made me realize that I, too, want to work harder to improve my English skills in the future.

◆ **Exchange partner school students**

First of all, I was amazed at how well the students from the United States and Canada spoke Japanese. When they shared what they found charming or appealing about Japan, I realized that the things I had always taken for granted could be seen as wonderful from the perspective of people from other countries. That made me very happy.

One of the most memorable moments was when we shared traditional dances from each of our countries. In Japan, we taught them Bon Odori, and from the U.S., they taught us the Cha Cha Slide. Dancing together with everyone was truly enjoyable.

Before participating, I had many worries—such as what I would do if I couldn't speak in English or if the conversation came to a halt. But through this event, what made me happiest was seeing that people from abroad were genuinely interested in Japan, the country where I was born and raised.

Everyone was so kind, and I felt that the time we had together was not nearly enough. This experience motivated me to improve my English so that I can communicate the unique charm of Japan to people from many different countries and enjoy conversations with them.

5. Disseminations by the Participants (excerpt), Articles, etc.

Sa aha, and I had an amazing time with our host family today. They had a really nice traditional Japanese house. During the homestay, I learnt a lot about Nagoya and life in Japan. During the day, we had a very nice homemade breakfast, and went to the Toyota museum. We had lunch at a local café, then, we went to 大須 in Nagoya to do some shopping. Sadly, after that, we had to part ways. There was no way for me to thank them enough for the wonderful hospitality they showed in the short time I was over. It was only for a short period of time, but it's an experience I will never forget. #Kakehashi #Kakehashi2025 	
February 15, 2026 (Facebook) Undergraduate Student (Canada) We had an amazing time with our host family today. They had a really nice traditional Japanese house. During the day, we had a very nice homemade breakfast and went to the Toyota Museum. We had lunch at a local café, then, we went to Osu in Nagoya to do some shopping. Sadly, after that, we had to part ways. There was no way for me to thank them enough for the wonderful hospitality they showed in the short time I was over. It was only for a short period of time, but it's an experience I will never forget.	February 19, 2026 (Facebook) Undergraduate Student (United States) This past week I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in KAKEHASHI Project – a friendship ties program between North America and Japan. I am truly grateful for the invitation and I made so many wonderful friends along the way. I would like to extend my gratitude to all of the organizers and hosts who made this experience possible. The highlights of my trip were the homestay, where the kindest family introduced me to their daily life in Toyota-shi (I really ought to go back one day), the exchange at Chukyo University, and the visit to the Fukagawa Edo Museum. The students at Chukyo University were so welcoming and I had such an incredible time. And of course, my love for Edo Period literature made for a truly memorable museum trip. As I prepare to report my findings, I'm looking back on my time here and I cannot even begin to express how thankful I am for everyone I've had the opportunity to speak to along the way.

On the 2nd and 3rd days of #Kakehashi2025, we took the Shinkansen to Nagoya prefecture! The view of Mt. Fuji from the window made us all elated for the trip. Once in Nagoya, we saw the castle in the center of the city and enjoyed the regional cuisine. Then, we kicked off the homestay! Our host family took me and Karson Miles to Gifu prefecture, where we took in the wide and natural scenery. The entire family's hospitality and graciousness was truly a gift. One of the best parts of #Kakehashi is how we are able to see the parts of Japan that we wouldn't be able to as a tourist.

One major takeaway I had was that even across cultures, there is always an opportunity to build understanding and compassion among us. Through these posts I hope to inspire people to connect with people from Japan. #Kakehashiproject



February 19, 2026 (Facebook)

Undergraduate Student (United States)

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February 22, 2026 (Facebook)

Undergraduate Student (Canada)

I just got back two days ago from a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Japan for the KAKEHASHI project, a government initiative to connect Japan and North America through people-to-people exchanges. I had the immense chance and pleasure to be selected as a participant thanks to my performance in the provincial speech contest and spent an unforgettable one-week trip where I experienced so many things surrounded by incredible people. It was a lifelong dream of mine to go to Japan, and let's just say that this trip only reinforced my desire to come back! (Which, as a matter of fact, I will do next month.)

You can look forward to many posts in the next few weeks, where I will give more details on the multiple highlights of my trip!

	
February 25, 2026 (Facebook) “22 students from the United States and Canada visiting Japan as part of the KAKEHASHI Project” On February 18, IUC hosted 22 students from the United States and Canada visiting Japan as part of the “KAKEHASHI Project” sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ten current IUC students shared their experiences going to graduate school, participating in the JET Programme, and studying abroad at Japanese universities. Among the IUC students who participated this time was a KAKEHASHI alumnus who first learned about the IUC during the 2024 iteration of this event and later applied to enroll. A big “thanks” to everyone involved in this year’s meaningful and rewarding program.	February 17, 2026 (Imperial Household Agency’s Website) Audience Granted by Their Imperial Highnesses at the Residence of Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Takamado for the Invitees of the Joint Invitation Program for the KAKEHASHI Project Japanese Speech Contest Award Recipients (U.S.), Japanese Language Learners (Canada), and Japan Bowl Participants (Canada).

6. Presentations of Program Findings and Action Plan at the Reporting Session (excerpt)

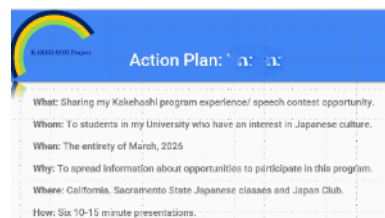
Locations: Tokyo, Aichi, Kanagawa – Presentations by a total of 4 groups

Common to all groups
【Results of the Program】 ◆ Learnings from the program We experienced how the entire country works together to warmly welcome others, as well as how modern architecture and technology coexist in harmony with traditional culture. We also learned the importance and joy of building deep friendships with people I might never have met otherwise, and of nurturing lasting relationships through new encounters. There are many efforts to reduce friction, from transportation to daily manners, and harmony and consideration are important in society.

◆ Making use of your experience in your future

By listening to IUC students share their study abroad experiences and cautions, gaining information on how to approach the job market in Japan, and learning through interactions in Japan the importance of being approachable to exchange students who are nervous about English, I was able to reconsider my mindset and approach in my field of study, which clarified the direction of my future.

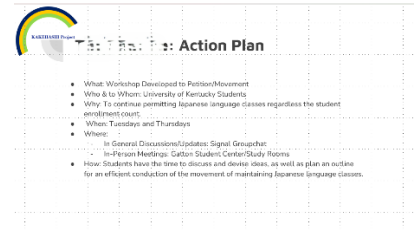
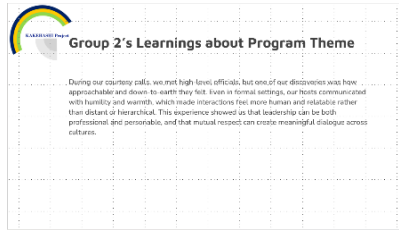
Group 1 (United States)



【Action Plan】

1. This Spring Semester, I will share my experiences from the KAKEHASHI Project and volunteering at Japan-America Association of South Carolina (JAASC) with students interested in Japan and JAASC collaborators. My goal is to show the value of learning Japanese culture through experience and to support the local community. Presentations will be held at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) Japanese Language Club, language classes, and JAASC offices, starting as soon as I return.
2. I will present my experiences from the program to about 150 students interested in Japan or learning Japanese at Oregon State University's Japanese Student Association and Japanese Language Club. The goal is to make learning about Japan more approachable and relatable.
3. As chairman of the 2026 Austin Regional Japanese Speech Contest, I will promote the KAKEHASHI Project by motivating participants and introducing it to professors, students, and the audience. During my study abroad at a Japanese university starting in April 2026, I will work with students, club members, and coworkers to represent America positively, foster goodwill, and build meaningful connections for the future.
4. I have begun sharing my KAKEHASHI experiences on various SNS platforms and will continue to do so. I am also writing a public article in Seattle with my local consulate to share my experience. I plan to recommend resources I discovered, such as Chukyo University and IUC, to friends, family, and peers. These unforgettable experiences have taught me much and will inform my future teaching around the world.
5. In March 2026, I will share my KAKEHASHI Project experience and speech contest opportunity with students interested in Japanese culture at Sacramento State's Japanese classes and Japan Club. The goal is to inform them about opportunities to participate in the program.
6. I will give two English presentations on the KAKEHASHI Project and my Japanese studies journey to participants of the 27th San Diego Japanese Speech Contest and students at San Dieguito Academy. The goal is to inspire students to pursue their passions and explore new opportunities. Presentations will be held at UC San Diego (La Jolla) and San Dieguito Academy (Encinitas).

Group 2 (United States)



【Action Plan】

1. I will present "Big World, Small World: The KAKEHASHI Project and Building Bridges between Japan and North America" to DePaul's Japanese Studies Department during the May “茶 Tea-Time” study group, featuring trip photos, insights, and a Q&A session.
2. I will write an article for the University of Central Florida's new Japanese website about my KAKEHASHI experience and how my prior studies helped me. I will also coordinate with UF's Japanese Club to plan online and campus events for Japanese international students, showcasing American culture while promoting cultural exchange, and advertise them to relevant student groups.
3. I will give presentations on my KAKEHASHI Project experience at my former high school and at Pennsylvania State University, each followed by a Q&A. The audiences—high school language/culture students and university Japanese students—are likely to be interested, and I hope to inspire more participation in the high school Japanese program. Presentations will include a PowerPoint and be coordinated with school staff.
4. I will develop a mobile app prototype for KAKEHASHI participants to record daily discoveries, reflect on their experiences in Japan, and create shareable posts for social media. I will build the app individually using Swift, including a daily journal, insight cards, and an action plan guide. The MVP will be completed within 1–2 months after returning, and I will share the app and reflections online with KAKEHASHI hashtags to support cultural understanding.
5. I will organize a workshop for University of Kentucky students to support the petition and movement to continue offering Japanese language classes regardless of enrollment numbers. Meetings will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with general discussions and updates shared via the Signal group chat and in-person planning sessions at the Gatton Student Center study rooms. Students will use the time to discuss ideas and plan an effective strategy for sustaining the Japanese program.

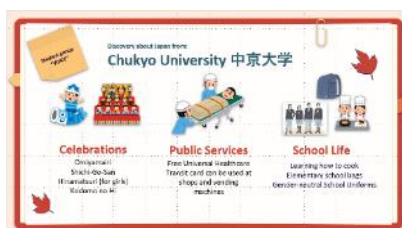
Group 3 (Canada)



【Action Plan】

1. The KAKEHASHI Project presentation will share firsthand experiences from Japan and personal insights to University of Calgary students and faculty, including guests from the Japanese Consulate.
2. I will speak at the Ontario Japanese Speech Contest (OJSC) speech contest in Toronto, ON, sharing my journey learning Japanese and encouraging Japanese learners in Ontario to be more active in the community, with a visually engaging presentation highlighting the role of the KAKEHASHI Project.
3. I will create an article and vlog for Queen's University and the Kingston/global community, sharing my experiences and encouraging others to pursue similar goals, in collaboration with a Japanese professor.
4. I will create a YouTube video about my KAKEHASHI Program experience, combining photos, videos, and narration, to share with anyone interested. I'll make it myself and ask my Japanese teachers to share the link.
5. This year, I will join the JET Program and assist a speech contest at University of Victoria (UVic) to stay connected with Japanese culture, sharing my experiences with students in both Japan and Canada through JET and discussions with my professors.

Group 4 (Canada)



【Action Plan】

1. Present my findings and share my KAKEHASHI experience with the 2026 Japan Bowl Ontario participants on Zoom, to encourage them to continue learning about Japan.
2. Promote Japanese culture by going and joining clubs in school (JSA) as well as talking to friends and family about Japan bowl.
3. Build a blog/website that serve as a sort of guide to Japanese culture and life according to the experience gained during KAKEHASHI 2025.
4. I will present my KAKEHASHI experience to my school's Japanese culture club, which has a large group of people interested in Japan, to encourage them to continue learning. I plan to contact the club leader and give the presentation before the end of the semester.
5. I will promote the Japan Bowl at our school to give more students the opportunity to participate, encourage interest in Japanese culture and visiting Japan, and advocate for the revival of the Jonai Middle School exchange program.

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)