



KAKEHASHI Project (United States)

Visiting U.S. Program for Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States (TOFU)

Program Report

1. Program Overview

【Objectives and Overview】

30 high school students, university students, higher professional student, and vocational school students, who will lead the future of Okinawa, were dispatched to Washington D.C. and New York in the United States as part of the “Think of Okinawa’s Future in the U.S.” (TOFU) Program and were provided with educational opportunities to learn about various fields in English through opinion exchanges, various observations, and other activities with relevant parties. During their stay in the U.S., through visits to various institutions and mutual exchanges with students, the participants themselves deepened their understanding of Japanese politics, economy, society, culture, history, and foreign policy by looking at the Japan-U.S. alliance from a global perspective and reaffirming its significance rooted in a variety of hands-on experiences. The participants also shared the attractions of Japan and Okinawa with the people they met at the various exchanges during their stay in the U.S., as well as what they learned throughout the program and about Japan's foreign policy.

【Participants】 Total: 30 participants from Okinawa (18 high school students, 1 higher professional student, 2 vocational school students, 9 university students)

【Locations】 Tokyo / District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.) / New York City, New York

【Schedule】

■ Online Pre-study Program:

Jan. 28 (Wed) **【Pre-departure Orientation】** Project objective and mission, rundown of the schedule, overseas travel warnings, precautions of infectious disease, etc.

■ Dispatch Program:

Mar. 18 (Wed) **【Observation】** Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
【Courtesy Call】

Mr. Christopher Allison, Political Minister Counselor, U.S. Embassy Tokyo,
Mr. Kelvin Gallman, Deputy Commander, United States Forces Japan

【Observation】 Tour of Ministry of Defense

【Courtesy Call】 Ms. IIZUKA Keiko, Editorial Writer, The Yomiuri Shimbun

【Courtesy Call】 Mr. KIHARA Minoru, Chief Cabinet Secretary

【Courtesy Call】 Mr. HORII Iwao, State Ministers for Foreign Affairs

【Courtesy Call】 Mr. MIYAZAKI Masahisa, State Minister of Defense

Mar. 19 (Thu)	Departure from Haneda Airport Arrival at Washington Dulles International Airport 【School Exchange】 Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC) Bell Multicultural High School 【Lecture】 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Lecturer: Mr. Nicholas Szechenyi, Vice President, Geopolitics and Foreign Policy Department and Senior Fellow, Japan Chair
Mar. 20 (Fri)	【Observation】 U.S. Capitol 【Courtesy Call】 Staffers of Senator Mazie Hirono's office and Senator Tim Kaine's office 【Observation】 Arlington National Cemetery 【Courtesy Call】 Ms. Margaret Hsiang, Deputy Director of the Office of Japanese Affairs, the U.S. Department of State 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. YAMADA Shigeo, Ambassador, Embassy of Japan in the United States of America
Mar. 21 (Sat)	【School Exchange】 George Washington University 【Observation】 Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II Travel from the District of Columbia (Washington D.C.) to New York
Mar. 22 (Sun)	【Observation】 Staten Island Ferry/ Statue of Liberty 【Observation】 National September 11 Memorial & Museum 【Observation】 Times Square 【Workshop】 Preparations for the Reporting Session (summarizing program findings, preparation of action plans)
Mar. 23 (Mon)	【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Joshua Walker, President & CEO of Japan Society 【Observation】 Tour of the United Nations 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. MIKANAGI Tomohiro, Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations 【Lecture】 Ms. OGAWA Kazumi, Director of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) 【Lecture】 Mr. SUZUKI Takahiro, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN 【Exchange】 Reception hosted by the Consulate General of Japan in New York Departure from John F. Kennedy International Airport (New York, New York)
Mar. 24 (Tue)	Departure from John F. Kennedy International Airport (New York, New York)
Mar. 25 (Wed)	Arrival at Haneda International Airport

2. Program Photos

Outbound Program

	
March 18, 2026 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Christopher Allison, Political Minister Counselor, U.S. Embassy Tokyo, Mr. Kelvin Gallman, Deputy Commander, United States Forces Japan	March 18, 2026 【Observation】 Tour of Ministry of Defense
	
March 18, 2026 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. HORII Iwao, State Ministers for Foreign Affairs	March 18, 2026 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. MIYAZAKI Masahisa, State Minister of Defense
	
March 19, 2026 【School Exchange】 Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC) Bell Multicultural High School	March 19, 2026 【Lecture】 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)



March 20, 2026 【Observation】 U.S. Capitol



March 20, 2026 【Courtesy Call】 Ms. Margaret Hsiang, Deputy Director of the Office of Japanese Affairs, the U.S. Department of State



March 21, 2026 【School Exchange】
George Washington University



March 21, 2026 【Observation】 Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II



March 22, 2026 【Observation】 Staten Island Ferry/
Statue of Liberty



March 22, 2026 【Observation】 National September 11 Memorial & Museum



March 22, 2026 【Observation】 Times Square



March 22, 2026 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Joshua Walker, President & CEO of Japan Society

	
March 23, 2026 【Lecture】 discussion session among students	March 23, 2026 【Exchange】 Reception hosted by the Consulate General of Japan in New York

3. Voices from the Participants (excerpt)

◆ High School Student

During the visit, we had the opportunity to interact with people from backgrounds different from those of Okinawan residents—people we would not normally have the chance to speak with. In particular, being able to ask questions directly to embassy staff, government officials, experts, and those involved with historical memorials was incredibly valuable. Hearing new perspectives from many different positions helped broaden my view and became an opportunity to rethink my own values and ways of thinking.

We also felt that engaging in dialogue with people who have different backgrounds and viewpoints is, in a sense, part of diplomacy itself. We realized how differences in basic assumptions can lead to differences in opinions, which made us strongly aware of the importance of dialogue. At the same time, it was a rare and meaningful experience that allowed me to feel what diplomacy is like in a real and practical way.

◆ Undergraduate Student

The visit to the Embassy of Japan left a particularly strong impression on me. Hearing Ambassador Yamada say that “the people of Okinawa are the ones who support the Japan-U.S. alliance,” along with his point that every personal connection forms the foundation of trust and eventually leads to understanding another country, really stayed with me. It made me feel that, in order to keep strengthening Japan-U.S. relations, we need to continue learning, keep seeking out opportunities to meet and talk with many different people, and keep pursuing the things we’re curious about.

◆ High School Student

During the school exchange, not many students said they were familiar with Okinawa. Among those who did, some explained that their parents had worked at U.S. military bases in Okinawa. Hearing this helped change the image I had before—that the existence of military bases was simply something unavoidable—into a new understanding of the bases as important facilities that connect Japan and the United States.

After this realization, I found that at other places we visited, discussions about the importance of

Okinawa's bases naturally stood out to me and were easier to understand. I came to feel once again that U.S. military bases in Okinawa are not only institutions that exist under rules agreed upon by Japan and the United States, but also serve as important points of awareness and understanding for people in both countries.

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

 私が参加プログラムで学んだことは自分自身の意見を持つ大切さ、また相手の意見も聞くことの大切さです。必ずしも受け入れる必要はなく、異なる意見も知ることで視野が広がりました。沖縄県より遠く離れた地でも自分たちの声を出し、意見を述べることができたので、自分自身の意見も発表。海外に個人でメッセージを送ることに挑戦しました。	 今回のTOFUで私が特に学んだことは「人として相手と対話する、架け橋を作る人になると、良い未来を作れる」ということです。 国連ツアーや、ジャパンソサエティ、またステイシーさんの話などを聞いて、「平和な未来を作ることに少しでも貢献できるひとになりたい」といふ私の目標に近づくヒントがもらえました。 参加するまでは、どこか大きな目標に思えたことも、大切なことは身近にあって、それは自分にもできることだということがわかりました。
March 24, 2026 (Instagram) High School Student What I learned through this program is the importance of having my own opinions, expressing them, and listening to what others have to say. I realized that I don't have to accept everything, but it is important to understand different viewpoints. I also came to see that, if we want to make Okinawa better, we need to speak up as the voices of Okinawa. That's why I want to be someone who can hold their own opinion and share them with the people around me.	March 23, 2026 (Instagram) High School Student What I learned most through the TOFU Program is that "when you engage with others person-to-person and become someone who can build bridges instead of conflict, you can help create a better future." Listening to the stories during the UN tour, at Japan Society, and from our guide gave me hints that brought me closer to my goal of becoming someone who can contribute, even in a small way, to building a peaceful future. Before joining the program, that goal felt too big, but I realized that the important things are actually close to us, and they are things we can do ourselves.

I was honored to participate in the TOFU Program (Think of Okinawa's Future in the U.S.), a program that gave me the opportunity to explore the future of Okinawa and its connection to the broader U.S.-Japan relationship.

Through visits and discussions with institutions such as the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Embassy, CSIS, George Washington University, and the United Nations, I was able to learn from people working in government, diplomacy, academia, media, and international affairs.

What stood out to me most was that U.S.-Japan relations are far more than a matter of policy alone. They are shaped by trust, dialogue, historical understanding, and the perspectives of local communities. As someone from Okinawa, this was especially meaningful, because Okinawa is one of the places where the alliance is felt most directly in everyday life.

This experience helped me understand more clearly that the future of U.S.-Japan relations requires not only strategic cooperation, but also a serious effort to listen to different perspectives and build mutual understanding. It also reminded me that young people have a role to play in these conversations.

I am sincerely grateful for this opportunity and for everyone who shared their insight with us throughout the program.

#TOFUProgram #Kakehashi #USJapanRelations #Okinawa #MOFA



March 24, 2026 (Instagram)

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ウォーカー ジョシュア
2週間前

...

The most meaningful moments this week for me have come from spending time with the next generation...starting with Jack and Macy of course!

At [Japan Society](#) I had the chance to meet with an inspiring group of visiting students from Okinawa through the "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) program run through the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#) - thoughtful, globally minded, and asking exactly the right questions about where they fit in a changing world.

And at [Hunter College](#), connecting with working students focused on Japanese studies was just as energizing - balancing real life with big ambitions and a deep commitment to understanding Japan and its global role.

I shared some of my own journey, but walked away just as inspired. If even a few of these conversations help shape their paths forward, then it's time well spent.

The future of the U.S.-Japan relationship is in good hands if we can just get there!



April 2, 2026 (Mr. Joshua Walker, President & CEO of Japan Society's LinkedIn)

At Japan Society I had the chance to meet with an inspiring group of visiting students from Okinawa through the "Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" (TOFU) program run through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan - thoughtful, globally minded, and asking exactly the right questions about where they fit in a changing world.

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

Locations: District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.) / New York City, New York

Presentations by a total of 5 groups

Group 2

嘉手納外語塾で月1回行われている国際交流の場を利用して、米軍基地所属のアメリカ人と若い世代に意見交換をしよう

【国際交流の流れ】

- アイスブレイク
 - 1対1で各自2分間テーマを決めて語る(テーマ:沖縄の文化、アメリカの文化について知ってることなど)
 - A big wind blows everybody like me who... (ブルームバスケット)
- 経験者マッピング
 - 安全保障/経済/環境/生活についてなど、個人的に異文化理解をする上で大切だと感じる優先順位をつけて、グループで意見交換をする
- 米軍基地のメリット/デメリットについての意見交換
 - 沖縄県・日本政府・米軍基地側の3グループに分かれて、それぞれ米軍基地のメリットとデメリットを出し、各グループでまとめた意見を発表してもらうこと

（事後活動）経過 3 米軍基地 1 週間以内に提出
で、自分とは違う意見を知ることができる

【アクションプランでの目的、達成したいこと】
私たちは TOFU プログラムを通して、様々な視点から見た日米地位協定や沖縄に米軍基地があることの意味を知りました。「日米関係は沖縄の人に支えられている」「米軍としても沖縄の若い人の意見が聞きたい」「外資系や日本政府も沖縄の意見をアメリカ側に伝えて」「日米地位協定はアメリカ側がかなり譲歩した協定である」という、今まで沖縄に住んでいて聞くことも考えこともなかった視点を、シンクタンクのニコラス・セチューニー氏や山田大使をはじめ、在日米軍幹部などからの抗議や質疑応答を通して知ることができました。この意見や新しい視点を持つことの大切さ、勇気である、できないに聞かずに相手の話を聞き入れる大切さ、色々な話を聞いて自分の意見を持つことの大切さを参加者に理解して欲しいという思いがあります。

【Results of the Program】

◆ Learnings from the Program

Through this program, we learned that Okinawa, the Japanese government, and the U.S. military all have very different understandings of the U.S.–Japan Status of Forces Agreement and the issues surrounding U.S. bases (in Japan, particularly Okinawa). This made us realize how important it is to look at things from multiple angles. We also became aware of things we hadn't really noticed before, like Okinawa's geographic advantages and how significant Okinawa is within the U.S.–Japan relationship, precisely because we grew up so close to the bases. On top of that, we felt firsthand how meaningful it is to listen to others, accept their opinions, and form our own thoughts through dialogue, and how differences in culture and values can lead to deeper understanding.

【Action Plan】

We want more youths to experience what we learned through the TOFU Program, especially the importance of understanding diverse perspectives and how dialogue helps deepen mutual understanding. To do that, we plan to use the monthly international exchange sessions held at Kadena Language Institute to create opportunities for Okinawan youth and Americans working on U.S. bases to share their thoughts and opinions.

During the exchange, we'll start with icebreakers like one-on-one themed conversations to make it easier

for everyone to talk. Then we'll use "values mapping" to share opinions on topics such as security, the economy, the environment, and daily life. After that, participants will split into groups representing the Okinawan side, the Japanese government side, and the U.S. military side to organize the merits and drawbacks of the bases and then present their ideas so everyone can hear each other's perspectives. Through these kinds of conversations, we hope to give participants chances to gain new viewpoints and develop the ability to listen to and accept different opinions.

Group 3

一番伝えたい目標「沖縄と世界の未来をよくするには…」
 そのためには
 ・互いの意見のことを分かり合える人を増やすこと
 ・多くの大人を通じての意見を得られた
 ・違う意見も分かり合えることが解決への道

自分たちが学んだのは
 ファイティングは何も解決しない。
 ・実際に、今の戦争も意見が対立して多い。
 ・お互いにとって結果的な解決策が思いついていない。
 そうなると
 「どちらかが苦しんだり、どちらも妥協した感じになってしまっている。」
 ・51対49の外交を目指すには分かり合える人を増やすことが大切。

具体的なアクションプランについて
 STEP1
 中高生をターゲットにして、対話を通して自分の意見を考える場所を提供する。
 STEP2
 1でやったことを他人に対して他人事と思わないように、また結果としてちゃんとつながれるように考える場の提供だけで終わらずに発表する場を提供する。
 具体的なイメージ案
 ・中高学校にアが取りしてアクションプランをできる時間をとってもらう。
 ・グループワークを通して自分の意見と相手の意見を知り、違いがあるという事を実感してもらう。
 「*正解を考えてほしくない*」
 問題提起の具体案として
 ・分かり合うとは
 ・平和とは
 ・どんな未来になってほしい
 もし…
 具体的に基地問題と決めてしまうと賛否の対立がテーマとなってしまうから現状と変わら

【Results of the Program】

◆ Learnings from the Program

Through the program, we learned that conflict and confrontation don't solve anything, and that it's important to try to understand the other person's perspective. We also learned that in real international issues, differences in opinion can make it hard to find solutions, sometimes causing one side to suffer or forcing both sides to compromise. We realized that aiming for diplomacy that feels like 51 to 49 requires increasing the number of people who can understand each other's viewpoints. Through case studies and dialogue, we also felt how important it is to be open to different opinions and to accept differences

【Action Plan】

We want younger generations to experience what we learned in the TOFU Program about the importance of trying to understand each other's opinions. To do that, we plan to create a space for junior and senior high school students where they can think about their own views and learn from others through dialogue.

First, we will ask schools for their cooperation and use part of class time to run a dialogue-based workshop. In the workshop, students will share ideas in groups and think about themes like "What does it mean to understand each other," "What is peace," and "What kind of future do we want." We will avoid topics that split people into yes or no positions, and instead, focus on creating an environment where diverse opinions can come out naturally without looking for a single correct answer.

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)